Anchor (steadfast you drag me down)

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Summary

When Will Graham at the age of eight was discovered to be a guide it was much to the disappointment of his father who had vehemently prayed for a sentinel. His mother had been one, which greatly increased the odds, but it seemed mistress luck forever had a grievance with the Graham family.

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will Graham at the age of eight was discovered to be a guide it was much to the disappointment of his father who had vehemently prayed for a sentinel. His mother had been one which greatly increased the odds, but it seemed mistress luck forever had a grievance with the Graham family.

Even if Will had turned out to be augmented with only one enhanced sense, Isaac Graham could have basked in the knowledge of the high end college scholarships and jobs which would have easily opened their doors for his son when older, or at least Will would have been able to help with the more delicate work on the boat engines at the shipyard. The fact that Will had registered as having the highest score in empathy since the registry was founded mattered little. They were dirt poor and couldn't afford much more than the basic health and safety course legally required for all newly registered guides.

Due to the world population total of sentinels and guides teetering merely at around 9%, training was considered a luxury only the wealthy or talented could afford, and with low scores in both projection and psychometry there wasn't much use for Will as a guide in a professional capacity and most scholarships refused him.

Not that there was much use for Will as a guide, period.

His high empathy score, while impressive (making its round in local and even national newspapers), just wasn't practical. His first attempt at bringing a sentinel out of a zone as only a young teenager ended in him essentially zoning himself, so in in tune with what they were experiencing that he was no longer able to differentiate his own thoughts from theirs. Will took the incident poorly, let down that he wasn't able to perform the single task he knew he should be born to be able to.

It was this knowledge of him being a failed guide that drove Will to hide his slowly increasing projection and psychometric abilities. He learnt control by trial and error, forcing himself further into his role as an outcast as interaction with people became gradually more and more overwhelming and painful. He subconsciously retreated from even the label of 'guide', avoiding any and all stereotypes that came with it. Instead of a career in a caring profession as most guides tended to gravitate towards, Will elected instead to follow one within the police. Despite this being an occupation which was standard among sentinels, who greatly outpaced most of everyone else, Will still managed to do well for himself, gaining a position as a homicide detective.

It was during this time that Will tentatively created his first sentinel-guide bond with his partner. Lewis Taylor was a kind, bright sort of person with a good sense of humour who people instinctively felt drawn to and whose presence was one of the few Will didn't find grating. Their slow friendship naturally led to the formation of the bond between them, Will comfortable with this due to Taylor's weak touch enhancement never having led him to zone.

The bond helped secure them both in the present moment without being drawn as deeply into their different senses, and for a short time Will was content. Until he hesitated with his finger on the trigger and a suspect shot their bond to pieces, along with the majority of Taylor's chest.

A bond broken so suddenly, especially in such a fashion, required the help of both a trained guide and psychiatrist in order to fully recover, but Will refused both. He retired from his position as a detective, instead taking on a teaching post, his self-critical thoughts and whispers of his being 'weak-willed' with guides being 'unsuitable' for such work forcing him to step down.

Though his 'retirement' was short lived as he was soon hunted by Jack Crawford to consult on his crime scenes, Will's legacy as the most empathetic guide in the country coming back to firmly bite him in the ass.

He tried to maintain a distance from the first case he consulted on, but the infamous Graham luck had other ideas and he soon wound up face to face with a serial killer.

Needless to say, he didn't hesitate to shoot this time.

Chapter End Notes

Just a short intro into the story to give the bare bones of sentinel/guide universe which will be gradually padded out in the coming chapters! I've never actually watched any of The Sentinel but I've read quite a few AU fics and sort of ran away with the idea...If you haven't heard of the sentinel/guide trope I recommend a quick search :)

Drowning

Stood at the end of the police tape Will's nose was immediately assaulted by the smell of gore and the metallic sense of blood. He would almost feel sorry for the few sentinels on the scene if it weren't for their constant negative thoughts pounding at his skull. Not to mention that combined with the other mundane thoughts of the inhabitants of downtown Annapolis Will was decidedly not having a good morning.

He shook out a couple of aspirin, the bottle his lifeline when entering city limits, dry swallowing two before he made his way towards the body. The sight that greeted him did not serve to lift Will's mood, the image one that would exist behind his eyes long after the crime was solved.

It was a mess, face mutilated beyond recognition, chest and stomach open and spooling their contents onto the concrete below, wet and glistening darkly with blood. Deep gashes marred their arms and legs, eye sockets empty and unseeing, weeping blood. The bright clear skies of the morning were already working against them, the sun heating the corpse to a truly disgusting odour. Flies had already begun their decent, buzzing around as if it were merely roadkill, while officers hovered nearby like birds drawn to carrion.

"Jesus…" Will said, scrubbing his hands across his face.

"I hear you," said Jack as he came to stand next to Will, face grim, a thick cloud of determination, sadness and disgust following him. Jacks emotions always appeared as a cloud to Will, large and all-consuming, particularly at crime scenes where several different trains of thought were battling within him. He and Will were some of the lucky ones, the gruesome smell bearable and the humming of flies only a background murmur, but it didn't take enhanced senses to appreciate the nauseating sight before them. "Just like the others, this time found by a student on an early morning trip to the library, so far we have no other witnesses."

"Well if there was ever a good excuse for not handing an assignment in on time…" Will joked half-heartedly.

"Quite," Jack said, not even cracking a smile. "He's been here quite a while, neighbours say they didn't hear anything, though it's hard to judge as most of them were asleep when the crime was thought to have been carried out."

"He?" Will queried. While the clothes would suggest male, with the face and chest in the condition they were Will would've thought it hard to judge.

"Adam Henson, 28, male, 3 sense sentinel. Organ donor but not sure how much is salvageable from that mess," Beverly said, walking over and gesturing to the ID contained in the evidence bag she carried. "Found this in his pocket." Will was always impressed with her control, not even bothering with nose pegs or even the gas masks others employed at crime scenes, only the wrinkling around her nose and forehead betraying her discomfort. While the enhanced sight was a great help to her work as a crime scene investigator, the augmented

sense of small had to be lethal. She chalked it up to her high level guide girlfriend, but Will knew Beverly was just that diligent, the quiet enjoyment and satisfaction that radiated off her while working never failing to endear him.

“Could be the work of another sentinel,” Zeller piped up from a little way away.

“They are known to be particularly vicious, especially if there’s a guide involved,” Price joined in, bouncing ideas off each other as they usually did. Their thoughts and emotions were often so in tune that Will had taken to mistaking them for one person, jolting in surprise when entering the morgue revealed two people instead of his perceived one. “And with that enhanced strength of theirs this isn’t out of the realm of possibility.”

“I mean have you seen the way Bev reacts if you try to steal her lunch?” Zeller said, throwing a playful grin her way.

Beverly rolled her eyes and walked over to give both of them an earful, leaving Will and Jack alone with the body.

“I apologise for calling you out again so soon, but with this being the third body we’ve found I wasn’t sure we could wait long,” Jack turned to look Will fully in the face, the smog taking on a swell of concern. “That last case took a lot out of you, I need to know you’re alright.”

Normally Will would have bristled at the implication that he couldn’t handle himself. Guides were not *sensitive* or *delicate* and he was perfectly able to do his job, thank you very much. But, he thought back to how his hands had taken days to stop shaking, to the swirling knot of emotions he been rendered to, unable to leave Wolf trap as the control over his guide abilities regressed to a state they hadn’t been in since he was 16. The image of the man whose life Will had taken replaying on a loop each time he closed his eyes as he died vicariously, to the soundtrack of his deceased bond-mate’s voice criticising his every move.

Will swallowed, throat dry, “Yeah. I’m fine.”

Jack swirled in disbelief but seemed to accept the words at face value, clapping him on the shoulder (never having learnt, or choosing not to, that guides don’t tend to like physical contact), “Good. What do you have for me?”

Will took a few deep breaths to centre himself, drawing his attention solely to the scene in front of him. He gathered the wisps of the decaying presences and assembled them into a semblance of a full picture which he could then dive headlong into. To lose himself in the mind of another, his empathy and psychometry finally allowed to take full rein. Will had found that it could be quite an exhilarating experience to use his guide abilities to their full potential. Though it was not without its drawbacks.

Will was only just beginning to get a feel for the incident when instead of the clawed face in front of him resolving into Adam Henson, it was Lewis Taylor that stood in front of him. His bond-mate stalked forward, the same gut wrenching feeling of accusation he’d had when he’d died rolling off him in waves.

Will yanked himself out of the headspace violently, the shock like being doused with ice water. He gasped and his teeth began to chatter. He wrapped his arms around his torso, more in comfort than in warmth.

“Will! Are you okay, what did you see?” Jack asked, his concern and anticipation smothering.

“I…not a lot, Jack. Whoever did this felt righteous, as if they were ridding the world of some great evil. There was also a lot of…anger, but-but I don’t think it was directed towards him personally. I’m, uh, sorry, I’ve got to go,” Will said, turning and walking briskly away, heedless of Jack’s calls in his desperation to remove himself from the site.

Behind him he felt Jack’s concern swirl into hardened resolve, and Will knew this could only spell trouble for him later.

Engulfed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All things considered, Will was not having a bad day. He'd started lecturing again shortly after that disastrous crime scene, and while slightly overwhelmed at first to be back in an enclosed space under the scrutiny of such a large number of trainees (the heavy weight of their curiosity and admiration that blanketed the lecture hall stifling emanating from so many at once), Will had quickly settled back into his usual routine. Namely repressing his empathy as much as possible and pretending the audience was instead a single entity and not made up of individuals. Much easier to process and ignore.

The particular lesson he had chosen today was one of his more dull and uninspiring ones, mostly a litany of facts which would have to be rote learned, which meant the crowd of students disappeared into a thick haze of boredom. Altogether this served to obscure any of their additional emotions without much effort from Will, leading him to be able to finish up the day for once without the headache that usually blossomed between his eyes by the end.

He was just packing up the last of his things when he felt the familiar, warm presence of Alana Bloom enter the theatre. Will turned slightly to smile at her in acknowledgment.

"Hi," she greeted. It was all fairly normal, except for the tendrils of calm which were endeavouring to seep into him. Will rebuffed the attempt, narrowing his eyes. Alana was a fairly average guide, which naturally made her a pretty good psychiatrist, able to soothe even the most hysterical patients. But Will was not one of her patients.

"Hi," He replied, knowing the suspicion that must cling to it. If she was already trying to pacify him at the beginning of the conversation, he wasn't sure this was one he wanted to have.

Opening his senses more he discovered the concern bubbling beneath the surface of her calm, tension beginning to mingle as she found her attempts at projection failing. Will fingered the bottle of aspirin in his pocket.

"How are you?" Alana said, her smile attempting to do what her guide abilities did not.

"I don't know…" Will answered honestly, unsure of how he should be feeling about this.

He soon settled on ambushed, spying the storm that was Jack entering in behind her.

"What's this about?" he said, leaning back against his desk and crossing his arms defensively. If Alana and Jack had decided to team up, this wasn't going to be pleasant.

"We've noticed you've been…*struggling* lately, what with the conclusion of the last case we thought it would be best-"

Will shook his head, cutting her off, “No.” He knew where this was going.

Jack sighed, swimming in resolution, “even if only for a psych eval, just to help me sleep at night. Guides usually need more time to recover after traumatising events and so far you’ve not taken up any of the help available to you.”

Will felt his hackles rise. “Just because I’m a guide *does not mean* I am in anyway *weaker* than the rest of the population. I’m perfectly able to look after myself. I know my limits.”

“Will, that’s not-” Alana began, before Jack swiftly butted in.

“You can’t honestly stand there and expect me to believe that experiencing the sensations of a man as he takes his last breaths because of you is in anyway a pleasant experience which hasn’t affected you negatively,” Jack said, feeling assured in Will’s likely response.

Though Will let the silence stretch as he considered this, it wasn’t for the reasons Jack expected. While it was true some of the negative thoughts and problems Will was having centred on that incident, it was for the exact opposite reason Jack suggested.

“It was a deadly force encounter Will, even regular people usually require psychiatric help,” Alana said, trying to dull the cut of Jack’s words.

Will clenched his jaw, “I worked in homicide”

“And the reason you currently *used* to work Homicide is because you didn’t have the stomach for pulling the trigger. You just pulled the trigger ten times!” Jack raised his voice, frustration roaring to the forefront.

“And who knows what kind of residual damage there may still be from your broken bond,” Alana added. Their emotions building on each other, creating a solid wall of resolute determination. Neither of them looked like they’d shift on this.

“Fine, *fine.* But I am not seeing a guide. I refuse to subject anyone to the-the *mess* that’s going on up here,” Will said, gesturing vaguely to his head. Especially not kind, sweet Alana. He’d rather go forever than let her know how fractured his mind was, and how he failed miserably at being a guide.

Jack and Alana shared a look. “We thought you’d say that so we’ve booked you an appointment with someone Alana knows,” Jack said, looking slightly relieved. “No one else has to know.”

“I think he’ll be good for you, he mentored me during my student days so I know he’s good at what he does. He’s also not got a single drop of guide abilities if that’s your only concern,” Alana said trying to appease him, projecting a feeling of goodwill.

“That’s not my only concern,” Will said rubbing at his forehead. “But I guess if this is really necessary it’s good to know he comes recommended.”

Alana leant forward, placing a hand briefly on his arm and sending a pulse of reassurance through the contact. “This is really for the best, Will.”

He forced a smile, knowing it probably looked strained. Spilling his guts to anyone, let alone someone he didn't know was one of things Will least wanted to do, but if going would get them both off his back he didn't see why he couldn't turn up for the appointment. He'd go once and tell them it hadn't worked out. Alana had a finite list of colleagues, eventually they had to give up. He just had to be patient.

Chapter End Notes

This and the next part were meant to be one chapter but they ended up being longer than expected, sooo this is a double update :)

Submerged

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The appointment was for six the following evening but Will arrived in Baltimore over three quarters of an hour early, anxiety driving him to move quicker than he normally would.

It was polite to be early, but this was ridiculous, he thought, turning self-critical as he parked near the building. It hadn't taken him long to locate (though Will had hoped vainly), and after dithering in the car for a few minutes, he made his way inside.

The outside of the building itself wasn't impressive, but its sheer size spoke clearly of the affluence 'Dr. Hannibal Lecter' likely possessed. If his *office* dwarfed Will's house, it made him wonder what the man's own house was like.

Any lingering doubt as to Dr. Lecter's wealth was soon put to rest at Will entered the waiting area. The furniture was simple but luxurious, and the decorations lavish. The place practically reeked of old money. What was surprising however, was the effort that had gone into making it sentinel friendly. The colours and lights were unobtrusive, the seating of soft material, and the whole area was spotlessly clean with no traceable odour of cleaning products or any air fresheners, which were known to be overpowering to even unenhanced senses. This may all have just been coincidence but psychiatrists were generally more considerate than the general population, what with a large number of guides among them.

The walls themselves were thick, and more solidly built than most, not surprising given the opulence of his surroundings, but most likely soundproofed as to prevent sentinels from hearing much more than a murmur from the occupants of the room. However, this also led to Will being unable to get a clear read from anyone in the space beyond with his empathy dialled down to the level it currently was. Yet he didn't raise it, the repercussions of doing so when in the city not something he wanted to deal with right now. Not to mention that it would be fairly rude spy on someone during their therapy. The only thing he could sense was the presence of two people, which eventually became one when the previous appointment ended.

This meant that when the door finally opened at precisely six, the first thing he felt was the sting of betrayal as Will realised he was to spend the hour supposedly letting his guard down in the company of a *sentinel.*

If this was Alana's way of telling Will to form another bond she wasn't exactly being subtle. Just because she was kind and sweet didn't mean she didn't know how to manipulate someone when the time came.

'Not a drop of guide abilities'. Of course a *sentinel* couldn't have guide abilities.

"Will Graham? Please come in," Dr. Lecter announced with a polite smile, stepping back from the doorway to allow Will through.

He kept his eyes lowered as he passed, only glimpsing an expensively tailored suit lined with wisps of curiosity.

Will took a deep breath. It was just one hour, just one session. Even if it was spent with someone trying to dissect his thoughts and gain entrance to his mind, he could survive. At least it wasn't literal like it would have been with another guide.

The waiting room had nothing on the office. It was large and open, filled with so many books it could practically be a library. Lush carpets covered sections of the floor, and the lights were dimmed slightly, adding to the comfort of the room and making it seem more inviting. The seating was as comfortable and tempting as outside but Will chose instead to walk around the room, ascending the stairs to the balcony in a power play which hopefully put Lecter on edge to the same degree he was.

"What would you like to discuss?" Lecter eventually inquired. If he was put off by Will taking the higher ground, he didn't show it, the same tranquil neutrality washing up against Will's senses. Even the curiosity was incredibly tame to what Will was used to experiencing from others. The control he seemed to have was admirable.

"Surely Alana told you why I'm here." Will said instead of answering.

Lecter leaned against his desk, placing his hands in his pockets, "She let me know her intentions, but this hour is yours alone and you may use it however you would like."

"And if I wanted to sit in silence?" Will asked, testing his boundaries. Lecter's control had to have its limits.

"Then that's what we would do," was his easy reply, his emotions not even wavering.

Will dragged the silence out, to test his word but also to see if his control would bend, even a little. He walked slowly round the balcony while lightly trailing his hand across the spines of books, the tendrils of previous owner's essences tickling at his fingertips. Hannibal observed him, soundless from below, and Will observed him in turn. He was older than Will by several years, with a distinguished air that could only be gained with age. His defined jaw and cheekbones denoted him as handsome, but the neatly combed hair, dark eyes, and refined style made him seem almost otherworldly to Will.

After a while the silence became less bearable and Will sighed, defeated. "I was surprised when you turned out to be a sentinel, Alana didn't tell me," he said, deciding to start with what he was actually interested in. "Unusual profession, wouldn't you say Dr. Lecter?"

"Please, call me Hannibal. If I could, of course, refer to you as Will?" Hannibal asked politely. Will nodded, indifferent. "I wouldn't say it's any more unusual than your own. The FBI field lends itself more readily to sentinels than guides. Even regular people find they struggle with the competition."

Will snorted, "Not if Jack has anything to say about it." The man fought tooth and nail to get to the position he currently had, outstripping sentinels and proving to the higher-ups that not only people with enhanced senses deserved positions of power within the FBI. Thousands of

years of prestige associated with the name meant that just being a sentinel tended to open up a lot of doors, whether they were qualified for the job or not. Jack's life mission (excluding, of course, his obsession with the Chesapeake Ripper) seemed to be the firing of anyone who couldn't do their job, sentinel or otherwise.

"He didn't seem the type to subscribe to traditional roles." There was a quirk to his mouth. It must have been an interesting meeting. "What about you?" he said, turning the conversation back to Will.

Will pulled a face, "What about me?"

Hannibal quirked an eyebrow. "You go out of your way to avoid the stereotypes associated with yourself to the point where you potentially put yourself in harm's way, working on crime scenes despite the heavy load of emotion that surrounds such places." Okay, so it was fairly obvious he had a problem with his status as a guide, but it wasn't something he wanted to discuss with *anyone*, let alone a psychiatrist. He clenched his jaw and let the silence speak for itself. Hannibal got the hint. "As someone with as strong an empathetic ability as yours, surely you must have considered a bond as a solution to the turmoil you find yourself in."

Will wrinkled his nose, "I'm not exactly a people person. I don't often find the…connection needed to make one." Not to mention that Will did not want to ever form another bond. He wouldn't feel comfortable letting his defences down again, even a little. The damage that happened the last time he did spoke for itself. And even if he did want to, the only people he would bond with were one sense augments, and that type of bond wouldn't be strong enough to balance Will as he was now.

"A professional bond may be your solution. They don't require as much as a personal bond, but are often weaker as a result."

"I'm not here to form a bond," Will said emphatically, clearly wanting to drop the subject.

Though Hannibal continued, undeterred. "Professional bonds between psychiatrist and patient are not uncommon." Which was true. Guides were often capable of doing better work than regular people, able to actually traverse the thoughts of their clients and see the problems for themselves. Bonds were frequently used for more difficult, long term patients. A semblance of a bond was even possible between guides in some cases.

"Do you often bond with your patients?" Will asked, genuinely curious. Surely there wouldn't be the same benefits if a sentinel bonded with their clients, unable to navigate the bond as a guide would.

"Never. I was merely trying to ascertain what made you so against the concept."

Will contemplated this, and decided to answer truthfully. "My last professional bond ended… poorly." An understatement if there ever was one.

Hannibal hummed in agreement. "I can imagine it being difficult to trust after one is broken. Bonds bring benefits in security by acting effectively like a shield. The lone defence against

the overwhelming nature of civilisation, the rushing tide of humanity. Even the weakest of bonds shattered can affect you to your very core."

Will turned his head away, attempting to hide his surprise at having been understood so easily. "Have you created bonds with many people in the past?"

"Not one. With my only having three enhanced senses it isn't entirely necessary, and I find I prefer it this way. My control is such that I do not need one to function normally." If the command over his emotions was anything to go by, Will could almost believe that. Although, he did not expect Hannibal to be only a three sense augment. He could sense supressed power emanating from him, as large as any full sentinel Will had encountered. Yet why a sentinel would choose to hide their abilities was a mystery to him. "…but you are correct, the requisite intimacy for a bond is one I personally do not find appropriate for working relationships." Hannibal moved to look him more fully in the face, though Will still avoided his eyes. "Needless to say, a bond is not required to centre guides, should my patients find themselves drowning in their abilities."

"…Aren't guides the ones meant to anchor sentinels?" Will asked, avoiding the topic Hannibal was trying to broach.

"And now we're back to the topic of stereotypes," Hannibal replied, a grin curling at his lips.

"Well if we've come full circle in our conversation, perhaps it's time for me to leave."

A glance at his watch revealed that he had been there longer than he had thought, his hour about up. The session hadn't been entirely as terrible as he was expecting, though it was still doubtful he would return for another appointment.

Hannibal looked towards his own clock on his desk, agreeing that they had indeed come to the end, and moved towards the door. He waited until Will approached before he opened it with a flourish. In the process his hand brushed Will's briefly, seemingly on accident.

But that second meant *everything*.

All of Will seemed to focus on that point, rushing and expanding outwards as everything calibrated and recalibrated around Hannibal's mind.

And what a sight it was.

Dark, so dark, and deep, seemingly endless like the ocean. The waves lapping gently at Will's own mind as the water, icy and cold, cooled at the fevered heat brought on by his broken bond, gone unnoticed until that blessed second of relief.

But it was only a second, gone as quickly as it had come.

It left Will feeling slightly off-balance, his empathetic senses muted and calm as they had never been, yet aching to reach out again.

Will swallowed and dared to look fully into Hannibal's eyes. What he saw was seemingly a reflection of what he himself was experiencing. Surprise, unsteadiness, with a fiery *want*

igniting the irises. This was quickly squashed, but some of the fire remained and Will felt as lost in its depths as he had the ocean.

Hannibal cleared his throat, “I’ll see you next week.”

Will came back to himself then, rushing quickly past, and made his way out the waiting room.

Leaving the building, he had only one thought which kept circling.

No way in hell.

Chapter End Notes

"Accident". Is anything really an accident around Hannibal? who knows...

Troubled Waters

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The morning following his meeting with Hannibal found Will with one of the worst migraines he'd ever experienced. It felt like he had taken a spin off a roller coaster, landing with his brain splattering against the sidewalk while his head and stomach still swooped from the dips and turns.

The fleeting touch they had shared had grounded his abilities so considerably that he found as he drove to work that the feelings of others had become an easily ignorable background hum, instead of the usual flood against his senses. He almost felt like any other person going about his day, able to move about within the city without the discomfort that frequently accompanied him. He felt in control for once, able to dial up and down as he pleased, finding it amusing to guess passer-by's thoughts by body language alone without simply *knowing* for once. Although he took this for granted, ignoring that the effect would have to wear away eventually.

It therefore caught him by surprise when they suddenly ratcheted up during his morning lecture, every thought and emotion piercing his skull with Will unable in the middle of his presentation to lessen their blow. As soon as he could end the lesson he made an escape to his office, hauling himself away from the rest of the world as he attempted to wrestle his writhing abilities into order.

Although his office was small, bordering on claustrophobic, Will had chosen it because it was the ideal location for something like this. Situated at the far end of the building and deep enough into the winding hallways that hardly anyone passed by or came looking for him (not that he didn't ensure in other ways that no one ever came looking for him). This meant that he was comfortably able to dial down his empathy to more manageable levels without feeling washed out by having to keep others at bay at the same time.

Soon he was left alone with just the pounding in his head and his own circling thoughts. Which was both a blessing and a curse. Just as he hadn't wanted to think about when it would end, he really didn't want to think about the reason why his day had started as good as it had. Hoping that if he didn't think about it, the reason wouldn't actually exist for a while longer. So Will sat at his desk massaging his temples, waiting impatiently for the aspirin to kick in and steadfastly not thinking about sentinels or even one in particular.

As was the case when Will wanted to avoid thinking about something he retreated into himself. Closing his eyes, and with a deep breath he looked out at the river near his house.

The rushing of water and bird song replaced the quiet of his office, the smell of pond weed and damp almost instantly soothing. Before he would have imagined himself fly fishing, the repetitive motion familiar and comforting, but since a case he worked on several months ago he often turned to something…different.

The victim had been stabbed and pushed off a bridge while he still clung to life. He'd struggled in the beginning, thrashing wildly against the current, but soon gave in to the pull of the water. He had drifted aimlessly for what felt like hours, limbs too numb from cold and blood loss to move, while he took in the last sights he would ever see. Will had honestly never felt more at peace.

That's where Will found himself now, bobbing through the water like a corpse, clothes heavy and clinging as he took in the experience of the river in a way he never did when actually there. This time he took note of the sounds of animals in the forest which he floated past, categorising each one before moving on to the next. Eventually the sound of heavier footsteps drew his attention. At first Will thought they might belong to a person or a couple, but he came to the realisation that what he was actually hearing was a deer. But the noise wasn't quite right. It wasn't the crunch of leaves and soil, but instead a clatter of hooves against solid ground, nothing like which would be found near the river by his house.

He came back to himself, blinking a few times while he listened harder to see if the sound was one born from his imagination. His eyebrows scrunched in confusion as he heard again the echoing tap of hooves. Though they sounded fairly far away it was hard to tell given that Will's office was covered in pile after pile of books, papers and folders of varying size. It had been in an attempt to barricade himself further away, but also came with the side effect of dulling down any noise from outside. Yet that was definitely the sound of hooves against the vinyl floor of the building, and not the concrete of outside.

As the footsteps got louder, and even if Will felt vaguely ridiculous, he got up and moved towards the door to look out into the hallway. Opening it revealed nothing, just a corridor empty and lifeless as it usually was.

Will sighed and closed the door, shaking his head in an attempt to clear it. Though he froze as he heard a distinctly animal like snort, a puff of breath tickling the back of his neck.

Slowly releasing his grip on the handle he turned, heart hammering.

In his tiny office stood a stag, larger than any he had seen, antlers brushing the ceiling. It seemed to leech all light from the room, its coat a deep black with what appeared to be feathers adorning its neck. An all-consuming stench of death surrounded it, making the black, all-seeing nature of its eyes all the more ominous. It pawed at the ground, its breath misting in the air.

Will swallowed and took a step towards it in an attempt to test how real it was. On closer inspection the feathers looked darker than the fur, the tips doused in a dark liquid which Will thought may have been blood. The steps forward may have been bit hasty. As in the river, Will felt the same sense of inevitability overtake him, locked in position as he stared into its eyes.

Just then a knock sounded on the door, breaking the spell Will seemed to be under.

He whipped his head round towards it, startled. Uncomfortable having the creature behind him, he spun quickly back, but doing so revealed his office in exactly the same state it was before, minus the giant stag. The knock sounded again at the door.

“Yeah?” Will called out, voice high pitched and betraying his panic. He continued staring at the empty space it had stood, thoughts whirling for an explanation. Hallucinations were really the last thing he needed right now.

“Hi Will, sorry I–” Came the voice of Alana Bloom from the doorway, stopping as she obviously found Will stood in the middle of the room staring at nothing. “Are you alright?” She asked, concern colouring her words.

“What?” Will asked faintly, not really paying attention. When the words filtered through however, he quickly shook himself out his daze. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine.” Alana looked dubious, disbelief coiling around her. “Just, you know, tired. I thought I saw something,” he said, gesturing at nothing in particular. It was never a good idea to outright lie to Alana.

“Like what?” She queried, peering around him.

He closed his eyes, briefly pressing a hand against his eyelids. “A mouse or a-a bird or something.” Not technically untrue, it did have feathers. Though it was definitely bigger than a mouse.

She still looked vaguely apprehensive, but decided on a different line of questioning. “How did the session with Hannibal go yesterday?”

“Not…terrible,” he eventually settled on. “He wasn’t quite what I was expecting,” Will said, a slight barb to his tone.

Alana had the grace to look a bit sheepish. “I know I should have mentioned it, but I didn’t think you’d agree to go otherwise.” He’d like to think he wouldn’t have, but the strength of Jack and Alana teaming up was a force to be reckoned with and he probably wouldn’t have been able to evade them for very long. That didn’t mean he was happy about it.

“I appreciate that you’re worried for me, but I don’t need a sentinel in order to stabilize myself.” He wouldn’t mention how he’d started out the morning. That would be a terrible idea if he only wanted to go for the absolute minimum amount of sessions to make them happy. The hallucination was also concerning. If the withdrawal from his brushing against a high level sentinel’s mind for the first time had something to do with that then he wanted their association to end as soon as possible.

“Even the strongest of people need help now and again, Will. It doesn’t make you fragile, just smart to know when you’re reaching your breaking point.” While he disagreed that he was breaking down, he had to concede that he at least had a fracture that wasn’t getting any better.

“Yes, well, that doesn’t necessarily have to include a sentinel. I thought you understood why I wasn’t looking to guide anyone.” He tended to use his broken bond as a catch all excuse for anything involving sentinels. While it was true to an extent, the main reason he tended to avoid interacting with them as a guide was because he didn’t want anyone near his mind. The things that Will saw and experienced at crime scenes haunted him. He never wanted to subject *anyone* to his nightmares.

She nodded and walked further into the room, fidgeting with a few of the papers strewn about. “That’s actually the reason why I’m here.” She forced herself to stop and look at him fully. “That support group I mentioned to you a while ago is meeting this week and I want you to go.”

Will snorted. “What? No.” Just the thought was hilarious. Him, sat in a room with a bunch of crying, emotional guides while he awkwardly looked on from the corner? No thanks.

“I know you have your reservations but you need to talk to someone about this,” she sounded irritated, a small wisp of frustration escaping her.

“I thought that was why I’m going to therapy,” Will said, beginning to feel a bit frustrated himself.

“Therapy is for…therapy. This is so you can meet people and stop isolating yourself,” She said, her gestures became more emphatic.

“I’m not isolated,” he muttered, knowing the evidence was stacked against him.

Alana raised an eyebrow, lips twitching. “Do you have any idea how long it took me to find this place? It’s gotten even worse since you took the job here.” The ‘since your bond was ripped apart’ was implied. “Guides seek closeness and meaningful relationships. They’re personable; sociable. And I know you’re not the typical guide but you also need to connect with people occasionally.”

Will suppressed a laugh. “I don’t think ‘sociable’ has ever been used in context with me before,” he said, failing to hide a grin.

Exasperation wound around her, “Well there’s a first time for everything.” She looked at him seriously, moving back on topic, “Just because you don’t love crowds of people doesn’t mean you don’t like having company.”

“I’ve survived like this so far.” He’d had to learn to, for the sake of his sanity. It wasn’t like he was ever completely alone anyway, and he had his dogs.

“So you didn’t enjoy Hannibal’s company? Interacting with someone other than me outside of work for once?”

“…I was there because of work.” They both knew it was a feeble protest. He didn’t particularly want therapy or someone digging around in his mind, but the man himself hadn’t been *unpleasant* to talk to.

Alana sighed. “Look, I’m not saying you make a regular thing out of it, just that you go once and meet some people who’ve had experiences similar to yours. I want you to realise you’re not alone or *strange* for the things you’re going through.” He very much doubted that there was anyone else facing a mixture guilt and self-loathing for quite the same reasons as him.

“Statistically I know I’m not the only one with a broken bond out there.” It wasn’t a large statistic, there weren’t exactly a lot of sentinels and guides around.

“Yes, but cold hard numbers won’t give you the same reassurance that comes from actually meeting some of them.” She tried to project a tendril of acceptance into him, eyes wide and imploring, “Please, just as one last favour from me? Then I swear I’ll stop harassing you about this and you can continue hiding yourself away in this shoebox office as much as you want.”

Will thought about it for a second. It wasn’t as if he overly minded, it was only a couple of hours. “Deal,” Will joked. “I’ll bring you back a box of tissues as a souvenir.”

She rolled her eyes. “It won’t be that bad.”

Will wasn’t that optimistic.

Chapter End Notes

This took me longer to write than I thought, but the next chapter should (hopefully) be out in a couple days :)

Skin deep

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alana had been wrong about the crying.

One women had turned up who could only be described as hysterical. Though Will took solace in the fact that everyone else seemed just as put off by her theatrics as he was. Some saint of a girl had gotten up and escorted her out of the room, and hopefully out the building. She only looked around 19, which was harrowing. To have a broken bond at such a young age had to be traumatic, though she seemed to be handling it well.

After a short silence in the wake of their exit, a man positioned to the left of the circle to Will spoke up and began the session. He was small and of a slim build, with brilliant red hair and a matching shortly cropped beard. He was clearly a guide, a gentle breeze of acceptance and serenity flowing through the room and endeavouring to seep into the attendees as he began speaking, helping to project a welcoming atmosphere along with a small, easy-going smile and relaxed body language. It was all fairly textbook.

To start they all introduced themselves in a way that was, thankfully, not as reminiscent of the stereotype as Will had expected. Although there were a few other new people like Will, the majority of the group were regulars, which lead to a lot of joking around and general amity. All in all the atmosphere was pleasant and not the blubbering mess Will had expected and prepared for. Though he was distressed to find that the girl from before, Amy, had in fact been a member for over a year so would have been even younger when her bond was broken.

Will was also fairly surprised at the diversity in the room. The age range was immense, from Amy as the youngest all the way to a man who looked sixty. There was a mother of four kids but also a divorced soldier recently back from deployment. The leader of the group, Michael, wasn't even a trained therapist but an accountant who trained for the role after recovering from his own broken bond. There was even, to Will's quiet amazement, two sentinels sat at either end.

A bond isn't normally felt as deeply by a sentinel as by a guide, though due to their territorial nature Will supposed it was understandable how the loss could affect them just as much. Will was glad to have prepared himself for the worse with them there. Although they tried to rein in their emotions as all the other guides politely did, grief was a difficult one to control and was largely undeterred by the light draft of Michael's calming projection.

It wasn't a terrible experience but there were a few tears shed as people told stories and shared coping mechanisms they'd developed, and Will was more than a little uncomfortable and fidgety during the hour. But Alana had been right, it was good to meet the faces behind the numbers. He wasn't the only one out there stewing in a mixture of guilt and self-loathing, with a pervasive sense of *emptiness* sunk deep, unrelenting and almost fathomless where the

jagged edges of a bond remained. He was however the only one directly responsible for their partner's death, had seen the accusation in their eyes, and was now haunted by them in a way that would only ever be true for him. Will had stopped his hand from pulling the trigger to prevent himself becoming more like the killers who rampaged through his mind, but in the process had ensured the death of another.

The real problem was, Will did not feel strongly over the death. Of course he had gone through the normal level of grief at the loss of someone, but this was woefully inadequate to what he should have endured.

He hadn't really *felt* anything after his bondmate died. There had been no pain, only emptiness. There was the mutilation the bond had left on his mind, but this caused only residual effects not the scrambling of his emotions and abilities that everyone experienced. What kind of person felt nothing when someone literally tied to them was ripped away? Even with the weak bond he'd formed, he should have felt *something*.

Will would forever be alone in this; pain, not because he couldn't save his sentinel, but because he had felt nothing when they had left him.

It was just more confirmation of his inability as a guide.

After the hour was over they made their way towards a larger room near a kitchen where they were able to have some coffee or tea with some various snack foods scattered about. They joined up with several other people who had also been involved in groups around the same time, so the room was fairly full and loud with the sound of conversation. Obviously this was meant as an opportunity for attendees to talk to people and prevent anyone from isolating themselves. Will just felt vaguely nauseous looking at the crowd. Their emotions, though muted, were numerous enough to put him slightly on edge.

Normally Will would have excused himself from the situation but he had been herded into the room by the others and had felt awkward leaving straight away. He made sure to keep his hands deep within his pockets as he manoeuvred through the crowd, grabbing a cup of coffee and finding a corner he could sulk in until an acceptable amount of time had passed.

However, it wasn't long before he was approached by two people, Amy and one of the Sentinels whose name Will had forgotten.

The tension grew across forehead in a way he knew was going to lead to a disastrous headache later.

Amy smiled kindly, surrounded in a warm friendliness that was enveloping without being invasive, like a hug or standing near a camp fire. It helped keep his headache at bay for a short while longer.

"I remember it being hard to talk to people my first time so I thought we'd come say hi, make it a little easier on you." A nice gesture, though 'first' implied a second visit, which had a probability of roughly zero.

“Uh, thanks. And thanks for what you did…earlier.” Will didn’t want to imagine what the session would have been like if that women had stayed for the duration, or if he was the one tasked with stopping her hysterics. He shivered, taking a large gulp of coffee.

“No problem, I’ve been coming here for quite a while so I’m used to it. Didn’t take much to calm her down,” she shrugged, taking a sip from her own plastic cup. Even with practise the feat was still notable. When people work themselves up like that it becomes difficult to untangle their thought processes into anything resembling logic, and a powerful amount of projection to make another guide regain composure.

Will nodded absently while he tried to think of a way to excuse himself from the conversation without looking like an ass. She was just trying to be helpful after all, but he really didn’t want to be here longer than he had to. In the silence that lapsed Will felt something probing lightly at his mind and he drew back, glancing up from his cup to see Amy staring at him, fascination flickering within the warmth.

“Your emotions are very tightly controlled it’s amazing. Are you a high level guide? You didn’t really say much about yourself before.” Will had volunteered only the information he had to; his name and who he had lost. Luckily no one had pressured him into contributing any more after that.

“I have high empathy, but I’m basically null in everything else.” The lie came easily, over two decades of practise letting it slip naturally from him.

This seem to rouse some interest in Amy’s companion however, who had stood silently in a faint mist of boredom until now.

“Wait, Will…Graham? The same Will Graham with the highest documented empathy score?”

Will winced, in his experience this was definitely going to prolong the conversation.

“I’m surprised you know about that.” The news had petered out within weeks after he was first registered and now the only people who tended to know were those in psychiatric circles and, apparently, annoyingly persistent head special agents within the FBI. As a recent graduate in archaeology this wasn’t something he’d expect the sentinel to know.

“I took a class on sentinels and guides at college and your name came up a couple times,” he said dismissively, obviously a course he’d only taken for the credit. “It’s impressive, must be somewhat of a relief to not have a bond anymore.”

“Excuse me?” Will asked with a raised eyebrow, amused. Not the most sensitive thing to say to someone who’d just come from a support group for those with broken bonds.

“Oh sorry. I didn’t mean it like that,” he said rubbing at the back of his head. “I know it’s painful. Just that without a bond guides are able to use their abilities fully. You must have felt blind with a bond holding you back.”

“What?” Will blinked, honestly mystified. A bond enhanced abilities, both for the sentinel and guide. Control and management were easier which allowed them to extend their abilities

way past their normal levels. True they tended to centre on their bondmate unless actively directing them, but that was a blessing with how overwhelming society can be. Everyone knew this.

"…at least that's how it's been explained it to me." He scrunched his eyebrows and looked towards Amy who nodded.

"It's true. It might not be obvious straight away with all the…damage, but you'll see how much stronger you are. Sentinels may need guides, but that doesn't have to mean a bond. All it does is drain us, we function much better without one. It's kind of awful how we continue the myth of bonds being equal." The warmth surrounding her from before had quickly grown into a roaring fire of conviction, the flames licking at Will and causing him to take a step back.

"…I…that's not – you know what, never mind. I'm sorry but I've got somewhere to be." Placing his cup on one of the tables nearby, he made his way quickly from the room and out the building.

It was the type of wildfire likely to spread, easily whipped up by the wind and unquenched by any sort of reasoning. It had clearly already caught her friend, but Will was not prepared to put either fire out. Far be it from him to take away someone's coping method. She was in a considerably better place than he could ever be.

Chapter End Notes

This would be a good time to tell you that I'm not American nor have I ever been to any kind of support group. But this is of course an alternate universe so anythings possible and I've therefore made no mistakes ;)

The eagle eyed among you may also have noticed that at the end of the last chapter I said this would be out a couple days later...and this is definitely more than a couple days later. A lot of things happened all at once that I wasn't expecting (including a wasp nest in my loft which was terrifying) and it took me a while to get back in a writing mood, but my friend Bethalous helped kick my butt into gear :)

Next chapter: Hannibal!

Blood in the water

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was called down to the morgue later that same day, beginning to bitterly regret his decision to turn up to the support group. Or at least to not have taken a couple cups of coffee with him as he'd left. This was turning out to be the longest day he'd had in a while and he'd need all the help he could get.

There were never many people working in the morgue at any one time or hovering nearby, so his senses weren't in danger of overwhelming in the usual way. In this case it was the dead who posed the problem. Death, in a lot of cases, was traumatic, doubly so if the body finds its way into the hands of the FBI. It was the kind of traumatic that left strong impressions on crime scenes and, at least in Will's case, on everything the body touched after that. This meant the room was a virtual minefield for him, his psychometry jumping to attention and out of his control every time he so much as brushed against a work bench.

Having to witness several different moments of death flash before him as he tried to appear normal was a chore on his best days, but with the morning he'd had already, Will really wasn't in the mood. After a few months working with the FBI on profiles he was much better adept at keeping this ability even more tightly reined in when down here, but with the crowd from before and working his way through the city his tolerance was fraying.

He wasn't given much hope to his luck suddenly changing as pushing open the doors revealed just the great start Will had been expecting. As his hands brushed the wood he was assaulted with the image of a man being shot several times to the chest, so reminiscent of how his partner had died that Will's stomach churned and he felt vaguely ill. He was glad that most guides avoided the place like the plague because he would have been hard pressed to explain his reaction in that moment.

He was honestly also a little irritated. What had they done, thrown the body up against the door?! He took a deep breath, combing a hand through his hair and attempting to clamp down on the ragged edges of his control. Obviously they had just grazed the gurney as they'd wheeled him in, but Will very much wanted to be anywhere but here. He shook out a couple aspirin, swallowing them in preparation.

"Hey, you okay? You look a little pale," Beverly asked as he rounded the corner inside. Her enhanced sight often meant she was able to pick up on slight changes in skin tone or facial expression, which while extremely practical in her profession, was extremely unpractical for Will when trying to hide noticeable reactions to things he should officially not be able to sense. Though Beverly was a lot more relaxed about it than Alana, the soft light of her emotions left only a little clouded when he failed to give a straight answer.

"Yeah, just, you know. Long day," Will answered, raking a hand through his hair again.

“It’s barely past noon,” She said with a quirk to her eyebrow and a glow of amusement.

“Exactly,” Will said, attempting a smile.

The doors swung open again just then, the dark storm of Jack rolling in behind him. It looked like Will wasn’t the only one having a less than pleasant morning.

“So what have you got for me?” Jack said, coming to stand alongside Will.

Beverly moved them slightly further into the room where Price and Zeller stood around the grotesque corpse of Adam Henson, eyes still unseeing and chest and stomach still open to the air, though now some of the organs lay in dishes on a nearby table.

“Not a lot unfortunately,” Price replied and gestured over the body. “Pretty much just like the other two.”

“In what way?” Will asked not having had time, and unwilling to have made any, to look over the case file.

“Well, we couldn’t find anything unusual on him. Nothing on his clothes, in his hair, not even in the wounds. There were a few stray dog hairs but otherwise he’s clean,” Zeller answered while motioning to each area, the gloves he was wearing still bloodied.

“*Except* for the blood and tissue we found under his nails,” Price chimed in, their emotions bouncing off each other as usual.

“Please tell me you’re not saying a dog did this?” Will pleaded.

Beverly shook her head, “Unlike before there’s deep scratch marks on his arms, face, and legs, but they were definitely human made. The DNA under his nails is his own like the others.”

There was a short silence as Jack and Will considered what this meant, trying to piece together a method that would match the evidence.

“So what you’re saying is that this man may have *literally* ripped himself apart?” Jack said, roiling in incredulity.

The three of them shared a look, a feeling of uncertainty bubbling thick in the air, a slight undercurrent of unease sunk beneath the surface.

Will thought back to what he had picked up at the scene, before things had taken a turn for the worse. “He was forced to. There was definitely another person there. Faint, but definitely present for the murder.” The righteous anger he’d felt couldn’t have come from the man in front of him, and even if it had it wouldn’t explain why he was the one lying dead.

“What sort of threat would make a man stand there and tear into himself? It’s incomprehensible. And without restraint, making no noise,” Price commented, shaking his head and feeding into the general disbelief of the room. Will had to concede that he was right, the circumstances of the murder were strange. No sane person would tear their own eyes

from their sockets. Perhaps under the influence of drugs? But then that would've appeared in the blood work.

"…Well there is one way," Zeller began but was interrupted by a noise of protest from Price as Beverly rolled her eyes dramatically.

Jack raised an eyebrow and Price sighed.

"There are records of guides with such high levels of projection that they're able to physically control people, compel them to do whatever they'd like. But they're…myths," He explained.

"Legends," Zeller said dramatically.

"Fairy tales," Beverly ended with a glare aimed towards Zeller. "Bottom line is, we don't have much to go on at the moment."

Jack said nothing for a short while after the exchange, a thick smog of contemplation overtaking him. "It's best not to rule anything out. Could someone with such a large amount of power escape unnoticed?" Will felt his heart rate increase, thankful that Beverly's two enhanced senses did not include hearing.

"Unlikely. That's why there's screening procedures. No one's really able to fake or hide their ability from the registry, they're extremely thorough." Her glow dimmed with distaste, obviously drawing from her own experience. If the medical exams for sentinels were anything like that for guides, they were definitely unpleasant and invasive. They were some of his worst memories; trying to conceal parts of himself as someone invaded his mind, roughly rifling through every aspect of him they could reach.

Will massaged his head, hoping the aspirin kicked in soon. "I'll have to sleep on this," he said trying to escape the situation before he somehow gave himself away.

He left the room with a quiet feeling of unease. If he was able to conceal his abilities, there could well be others out there.

"So you believe there may be guides capable of compulsion? One of whom seems to be on a murderous rampage through Maryland," Hannibal asked from where he was sitting a short distance from Will.

Hannibal had spent the week looking forward to their next session, opening his office door at the beginning of the hour with a much more genuine expression of warmth than the previous

one. It seemed Will was more comfortable around Hannibal also, choosing not to engage in any power play like he had before, and instead actually discuss an issue he was worrying over. Although this had turned out to be less personal and not of the nature these sessions were intended for he still counted it as progress.

Despite this, Will had still spent the time detailing the case walking around the room. Hannibal had sat down in an effort to encourage him to do the same, however he seemed more interested in the various decorations Hannibal kept to fill the space than Hannibal himself. Though this was feigned if the frequent glances he caught aimed in his direction were anything to go by.

"You'd have thought they'd have had enough with just the Chesapeake ripper," Will said, wondering over and finally taking the seat opposite him, now finished with his account and having traversed the entirety of the room. He idly ran his hand over the soft leather of the chair. "It might be possible. A guide can avoid being discovered partially if their abilities strengthen after they've been registered. But the likelihood of that…" He trailed off, leaving his doubt as implied.

Hannibal understood Will's reservation. A guide's abilities in almost all cases were fully mature by the age of ten, at which point everyone was legally required to attend a consultation. Even adults entering the country had to retake the tests. In spite of this, he knew Will wasn't as disbelieving as he made himself out to be.

"It would indeed be very difficult for a guide to be able to evade the registry," He had heard tales of how exhaustive the guide exams were, they were difficult to fool. "Although that may not be a concept you are completely unfamiliar with," Hannibal said, looking closely for a reaction.

Hannibal heard Will's heart speed up, a small line appearing in his brow. "What are you trying to imply?" Will asked harshly, like a cornered animal lashing out.

"Just that with such a high empathy score it's strange that your projection and psychometric abilities never fully manifested. Not to mention that your mind is very…*vast*," he said, leaning back, voice almost dream like. Never before had he been pulled into another's mind as he had. And with such a fleeting encounter! It was practically unheard of. Admittedly he had instigated it on purpose, wanting to gauge Will's reaction to the touch of a sentinel, but what he gained was far beyond his expectations.

Will's mind stretched seemingly forever. Cold and dark and desolate. A frozen wasteland. Ice had engulfed everything in sight while frost froze the ground into an impenetrable barrier.

It was stunning.

What little light there was breaking through the darkness illuminated the ice in a haunting glow, striking against the deep black of the surroundings.

This was not the mind of low level guide, the spires and immense glaciers speaking of nothing but restrained power.

But something was out of place. Everything was melting, the drip and crack of the ice thunderous in the silence. There was a warm breeze, a fever wreaking havoc and destruction. He wanted to reach out and cool it, refreeze the water in his own design… But then he had remembered himself and Will's likely reaction to such an invasion, pulling his hand back from Will's own.

Instead of the ire Hannibal had been expecting however, he had discovered himself looking directly into the gaze of Will's eyes for the first time. He found the ice blue to be almost as captivating a sight as that of his mind, so much so he could imagine himself having once zoned on the flecks of grey around the irises.

This thought had quickly caused him to become aware of the loss of control the encounter had wrought in him, swiftly clamping down on the surprise and territorial want which had rushed through him unrestrained, still unsure of Will's own reaction to the brief moment.

The experience had left him unbalanced, the sensation one he hadn't felt in many years. He yearned to reach out again, instinctively recognising the guide as a crutch to steady him rather than the cause of the disruption. Though Hannibal couldn't say he overly minded feeling drawn to the man, he was likely the most fascinating person he had ever become acquainted with, logically he knew this could not end well for him. Just that short melding of their minds was enough for him to let his iron control fall to the wayside, which was not something he could allow in front of anyone with the kind of secrets he had to keep. Though it was also this experience which made him want to meet with the guide again.

As a sentinel his enhanced senses were physical, thus he had never felt anything like the intangible nature of a guides abilities. He had read accounts of sentinels able to peruse the mind of their bondmate as well as their own when involved in a bond to varying degrees, but as Hannibal himself had never bonded with another this was his first sensation like it. There were of course facsimiles of such a connection when he anchored a guide or the very few times he'd ever had to be led out of a zone as a child, but this paled in comparison to the link he'd made with Will.

It was very unusual for a sentinel to ever be able to experience the mind of a guide in such a way without a bond. Certainly, Will looked surprised at the admission, but quickly attempted to school his expression.

"I could say the same thing about you. Although I'm unsure what would be achieved by a sentinel hiding their abilities." Will stated, throwing the barb back at him, justifying Hannibal's concern in the process. Already their brief association had led to the exposure of one of his secrets. But it was the most innocuous one and he didn't mind indulging him, hoping Will might return the favour.

"If one such sentinel were to exist, I'd say there were a few reasons. There is a great societal pressure and expectation as to what a full sentinel should achieve and do with such achievements, not to mention at such a level they'd be forced into a bond. Both of which would personally not agree with my current situation, for example." These reasons had to be similar to Will's own, the man without question had some underlying issue with his guide status.

“I think you’d just like people underestimating you,” Will said, the corner of his mouth turning up in a grin.

Hannibal’s lips twitched. “There is that.”

A hush descended over the room after that, Hannibal unwilling to continue the conversation if it meant driving Will further away. His reaction before spoke volumes of how he’d likely react where he to broach the topic again.

During the break in the conversation Hannibal took the time to look Will over. He thought him a handsome man, though his attire was a mess and he was clearly exhausted. There were coffee stains on both cuffs of his shirt and dark bruising circles under his eyes. His clothes and hair were also more rumpled than usual, and his eyes, when he could catch sight of them behind the glasses he wore, looked to be perpetually in a state of drooping. Breathing in revealed a stale odour, not one of uncleanliness but one ingrained from frequent night sweats and bad dreams.

“Have you been sleeping well recently?” Hannibal inquired.

Will huffed a small, self-deprecating laugh. “Lately my waking world has been more frighteningly fantastical than my dreams.”

“In what way?”

“I hallucinated the other day,” Will said, scrubbing a hand through his curls. Hannibal tipped his head to the side in question. “A deer…a large stag appeared in the middle of my office. It vanished after a few minutes but at the time I was almost convinced it was real. I could feel its breath on my neck.” He shivered, his hand going to the back of his head at the remembrance of the phantom sensation.

“I assume nothing like this has happened before?” Will shook his head. “What were you doing before it appeared?”

“I’d retreated into myself. Into my own mind. I do it frequently when overwhelmed.” Likely an often occurrence without an anchor for such immense abilities. He wondered what scene Will imagined himself in and if it were anything similar to the sight of his actual mindscape.

Hannibal hummed. “It could potentially be your spirit guide revealing itself to you,” he suggested. Traveling deep within oneself would allow a spirit guide to be able to make first contact, it was why most sightings transpired during dreams. It would seem that Will would never accomplish anything in the typical way.

Will snorted. “Now that is one myth I know is definitely just that, a myth. A bedtime story.”

“I wouldn’t dismiss it outright. There are countless accounts and historical records that mention a spiritual representation of sentinel and guide. Just because they are still unconfirmed and uncommon doesn’t make the experience any less real. Similar to how people claim to feel the change of weather in their bones, the pain is still genuine.”

“Are you comparing my experience to that of arthritic old ladies?” Will laughed, but appeared to sober quickly. He began tracing mindless patterns on his armrest, head bowed. “If it were true it would definitely suit me. It wasn’t just an animal but an amalgamation. A stag and a…raven probably. It reminded me of death.” As he spoke Hannibal saw a dark shape appear to loom out the corner of his eye. He turned imperceptibly towards it and froze in place, staring into the black eyes of an abyss. Behind and to the left of Will stood the creature of his description, though his portrayal fell massively short of reality.

Its pelt was dark and all consuming, a black he could stare into completely without end. The feathers encircling its neck were doused in blood with hooves encased in frost. It smelt of gore and ice with a trace of loss and decay, its breath crystalizing in the air.

This creature was not reminiscent of death, it was a manifestation.

“But why would it appear to me now? I’ve had a similar routine for years.” Wills voice surprised him into looking back to him, having been absorbed in the sight before him, though his control meant that there was no other emotional indication to his lapse in attention. Will had also remained unaware of its presence owing to his inordinate interest in the carpet. *Good.*

“Perhaps due to the stress from your work. Alana told me your last case didn’t end on a high note,” Hannibal continued normally, as if there wasn’t a nightmarish creature staring him down.

“It wasn’t as bad as everyone seems to think,” Will said, shivering faintly at the chill his spirit guide had brought to the room.

“Your work in general then,” Hannibal said, leaning back and enjoying the sight before him. A Botticelli angel and an omen of death. They made quite a pair. What did it say about Will that such a creature stood as his spiritual representation, or that Hannibal were able to view it. He would have to do some further reading on the subject.

Will clenched and unclenched his jaw several times, debating. “I often find the thoughts of killers becoming my own. I can see and experience the potential deaths of anyone around me, both as the victim and perpetrator. I feel monstrous at times.”

This confession brought Hannibal’s attention firmly back to Will. His ability was astounding. His mind exquisite. And with such a manifestation representing his very soul, Hannibal could not think any greater match for him than this man. There was so much potential.

“And this distresses you?” Hannibal asked, eyes roving as his mind whirled with possibilities. He looked back in the direction of the stag only to find that it had vanished.

“…Not like it should,” he answered, shoulders dropping.

Hannibal smiled. This worked well in his favour.

“I see, how ironic. You’re distressed because you’re not distressed.”

“It doesn’t affect me. Nothing does. Not like it does other guides,” Will said quietly.

“Due to your broken bond?” He was confident he could heal the damage done in a way to suit his design, but if Will’s mind was fundamentally different before his previous bond it may prove difficult.

“…Before that.” Will eventually said, voice even quieter than before.

Hannibal took a moment to think through his response.

“You are unique, both as a guide and as a person. It would be wrong of you to judge yourself against the majority. You see the horrors of humanity and are stronger for it. You shouldn’t be ashamed of the power you possess. Even god cannot help but demonstrate his from time to time.” He let some of the warmth he felt for Will bleed through, knowing he’d sense it.

The feeling shocked Will into glancing up at him, and Hannibal once again caught a glimpse of ice blue eyes.

“I think…the session has overrun,” He said, glancing away and pointedly down at his Watch. “I better leave.”

Will hastily made an exit from the room, making sure to give Hannibal a wide berth.

And so the chase begins, Hannibal thought, his grin turning feral.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal POV!
Not sure how clear I made the transition but just thought I'd clarify that the trip to the morgue did not occur on the same day as Will's therapy session with Hannibal. Can you imagine? Poor Will would've been dead by the end.
Not a hundred percent happy with this chapter but I'm hoping its to the same standard as the others :)

Learning to Swim

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Originally Will had not intended to see Hannibal again. Their first meeting had sent off a shrill alarm telling him to get out as soon as possible…But Dr. Lecter had a 24 hour cancellation policy and Will had been too busy during the week to think about their impending appointment until the day itself arrived. He could have just not turned up, but that would have been rude towards a man he had nothing personal against. It was his own damn fault his mind had reached out like it had. Besides, Hannibal was at least agreeable to talk to unlike some of the psychiatrists he had interacted with in the past, Alana excluded.

So he had swallowed his pride, clamped down hard on his abilities and equipped himself for the hour. However, when the door opened, and he was once again welcomed inside, he was woefully unprepared for the *want* that squirmed under his skin, itched within his fingers. The want to reach out and experience such a mindscape again, feel the cool balm of waves and smell the chaos of the ocean.

He had panicked at this, keeping a much larger distance between himself and Hannibal than he originally intended, walking around the room instead of taking a seat. Not wanting to delve into anything personal, he'd started detailing the current case as the first thing that came to mind. He had scarcely thought about anything else since his trip the morgue, worrying incessantly over what it could mean for future guide laws if the perpetrator was in fact hiding their ability, and how this would affect him. If Will was discovered he would have to go to court, might even be forced into a bond which wasn't something he would wish upon anybody.

The topic was taxing, yet over the course of the conversation Will felt himself calming, the cooling way Hannibal's emotions presented soothing at his frayed nerves. Hannibal's words themselves however soon undid this, quickly latching on to the true reasons behind his anxiety over the case. His heart pounded and a cool sweat had trickled down his back. But it seemed he could trust him, the man in a similar situation to Will himself by his own admission. Unfortunately he let this knowledge and the gentle wash of Hannibal's interest lull him into admitting much more private information than he had wanted to, only snapping out of the mind-set when he felt the open warmth from Hannibal flow over him. Never had such an emotion been directed towards him in such sincerity, especially after speaking genuinely about himself. It was so unprecedented that for a second he thought he might drown in the feeling, overwhelmed by pools of copper, and had rushed from the room to escape.

It seemed he would never be able to leave Hannibal's office in a normal way.

Luckily, unlike with the last appointment, he hadn't needed a day to recover. He'd even had a few days of regular routine before he was called down to another crime scene. It was nice to have somewhat of a break but Will hadn't tried to fool himself into thinking it would last long, so was fully prepared for when the call came. Although he wasn't honestly expecting to be much help. With his mind in the state it had been recently, he didn't think he'd be able to

look much longer than he had the previous week. Dealing with fanatical guides, lucid dreams of stags, a connection with an unknown sentinel, not to mention a hangover from said connection did not bode well for his mental stability, especially if allowing his abilities free reign where a murder recently took place.

Coffee and aspirin recently downed, Will felt ready to give it a good attempt without a breakdown. He knew the way crime scenes worked now and could fall into the usual pattern if nothing else.

Although this plan soon crumbled as Will caught sight of an unusually bold blue just out the corner of his eye, turning to see Hannibal stood completely out of place in his ridiculous suit and ridiculous tie just beyond the police tape.

Will stood there for several seconds just blinking, afraid that this was another hallucination. When it became clear it was not however, Will soon became very very angry. There was only one reason Hannibal would be here.

Jack.

“What the hell is this?” Will said vehemently, making his way over to where Jack stood.

Jack raised an eyebrow at his tone. “A crime scene.”

“You know what I mean,” he replied hotly.

Jack sighed, lowering his voice so as to not cause a scene. The patches of exasperation that appeared in his cloud of emotions only served to make Will more irate. “Look, the last time you couldn’t stand looking at the scene for more than a few minutes, never mind being able to tell me anything useful before you went running off. I invited Dr. Lecter as a precaution, a life guard to pull you out when you start suffocating under the pressure. Or at least another pair of hands to keep you still long enough to tell me what you saw.”

Will worked his jaw. He had to concede that to an outsider’s perspective this looked like the best solution. Even Will himself knew there wasn’t a high chance of him being able to give Jack the information he needed, but he didn’t want Hannibal anywhere near him when letting his guard down. It could only end in disaster.

“You could’ve asked me about it first,” he said, grasping at straws.

“I made an executive decision.” He eyed Will’s appearance next to him, “One which I’m not regretting.”

Will felt his face heat. He was playing fully into the ‘emotional guide’ stereotype, blowing up at seemingly nothing. He couldn’t exactly justify such an extreme reaction to his own psychiatrist being present at a place he was known to be somewhat (extremely) unstable. But he still hated the implication that he couldn’t handle himself.

“Fine,” Will eventually gritted out. He half hoped this would all blow up in Jack’s face. Will would of course be the one blowing up, but at least he’d get some satisfaction out of it.

After this Jack began making his way towards the body, Will following behind, still simmering in annoyance. He let his irritation lash out at Jack in some sort of retribution, Will justifying it because Jack's non-guide status meant he remained oblivious. Though this backfired when they passed by Hannibal, his face still curled in irritation.

"Good morning Will…ah it seems my presence here is not exactly as welcomed as I had hoped," Hannibal said, catching sight of his expression.

Will let out a long breath, trying to release the frustration Jack had built up. It wasn't difficult when standing next to Hannibal's ocean of patience. "It's not you just…Jack…" he waved vaguely, trying to encompass all that he disagreed with about Jack in a single gesture.

Hannibal tilted his head in acknowledgment. "He does have a personality that many people grate against. Though I would've thought his attitude towards sentinels and guides might have been something you'd bond over," he said, the familiar curiosity rising to the surface. Will found it strange how curiosity from anyone else felt pointed and invasive, while from Hannibal it felt relaxed, a gentle push flowing as naturally against his senses as any other.

"Kind of," Will rubbed at his brow. "I agree with equal treatment, but there are still fundamental differences between sentinels and guides that shouldn't just be ignored until it suits him," grumbled Will. Jack would ignore Will's position as a guide until he was ten foot under if Will just kept supplying him with the information he wanted. As soon as he wasn't as helpful, suddenly he couldn't be at crime scenes alone. He had preferred it when he was ignored, it was this constant switching between caring and not caring which irritated him.

"Equity, not equality," Hannibal nodded. "Except when it comes to you," he said pointedly.

Personally Will felt it was perfectly fair that most of the concession's made for guides were ignored when it came to him, it wasn't as if he could actually function as a guide. He didn't want a sentinel *or* a guide as an anchor point. Whether or not he needed one was another matter. But that didn't mean Hannibal was right, not in Will's case at least. There were too many other factors in play than just whether or not he needed one.

Will bit his lip, considering how best to respond. "…I don't think you being here is a good idea. My mind hasn't exactly been under control lately, and I don't think I'd be able to stop it reaching out to yours like before," he said, deciding the truth may be the best way to get the outcome he wanted.

"As I said before, I don't mind having to centre my patients should they find themselves overwhelmed," Hannibal said diplomatically, giving rise to Will's irritation again.

"I don't want you to be near me when I start drowning in visions of murder," Will gestured sharply, keeping his eyes locked firmly on the ground but making his stance clear.

"All the more reason for me to be here to pull you back to shore," Hannibal swiftly countered.

More like further under, Will thought, his palms beginning to sweat.

They argued back and forth for a bit longer but eventually Hannibal won, the perfect logic that he was effortlessly always able to apply in his favour meaning Will didn't have a chance. With a sigh from Will and a small grin for Hannibal, they finally made their way closer to the body. On approach it didn't look any worse than the last scene, however when the breeze blew in their direction they were hit with a truly awful stench. The metal tang of blood had soured, the spilt organs already beginning to rot on the sidewalk. Obviously this one had taken a lot longer to be discovered. With it lying in the unused alley behind an unoccupied building it was probably only the smell that had alerted anyone to its presence.

The odour gathered into such a thick smog, only surpassed by the mass of disgust from everyone present, that even Hannibal with his impeccable control had his emotions greying at the edges. Will couldn't fault the lapse, the enhanced smell must have been torture. He even spied Beverly amongst the buzzing of the forensic team opting to use the standard issue nose pegs like the rest of the sentinels for once.

Will tried to imagine Hannibal wearing some and couldn't stop the snort of laughter that escaped him. At this Hannibal turned to him quizzically, raising an eyebrow while amusement trickled from him. Jack, having heard, shot him a withering look. Will already had a reputation for being odd, he thought this should at least come with some benefits, such as laughing at crime scenes while everyone turned a blind eye.

Will felt his anger spike again but this didn't last long as shortly afterwards Jack was clearing the scene and then it was just Will stood in front of the mangled corpse, his audience, today larger with the inclusion of Hannibal, stood a few feet back, and suddenly there were a lot more pressing matters on his mind.

Will took a breath to calm his nerves.

Though it had come as a shock to find that Hannibal had been able to experience Will's mind in any capacity, he was sure this was because of the physical contact and nothing like that would happen again as long as he kept his distance.

Will exhaled the breath and shook out his hands. Somewhat calmer, he began, letting loose the tight hold over his abilities and letting them unravel over the scene. He made sure to guide them much more than he would normally, giving Hannibal and the other onlookers a wide berth, even if he felt himself gravitating back that way.

Despite the body having taken longer to find than the previous, there was an abundance of energy for Will to pick up on. The wisps of the past presences were strong, if scattered more widely than he had come to expect.

It didn't take him long to gather them, creating a much sturdier and less patched picture which he could dive almost fully into. Yet Will couldn't help but feel apprehensive. If just the decaying presence of the guide was this strong, would he be able to extract himself from their headspace unscathed? Before he could work himself up, Will quickly took the leap, letting the pendulum swing.

He watched as everything drifted away until there was only him, the body and an empty alley. The smell became non-existent, the flies drifted away and blood became wet and

pooled back into the corpse. The body became slightly more flushed instead of grey, while organs took on the healthier sheen of recent life. But as he got closer to appearance of the guide, everything became more and more obscured until Will could barely see two feet in front of himself.

There was the sound of rushing, like of running water or a gale. Will felt himself swept away by the sensation, having to concentrate much harder than he normally would for the scene to resolve without him being carried away by the wind. Clearly this was the work of a guide covering their tracks, anyone with a lesser ability would have simply been blown away before their abilities could pick up anything, and before too long their presence there would fade completely.

The wind was like a blizzard, cold and biting, pushing him back with every step he took forward towards the body. The physical force of it was punishing, stronger than anything Will had had to fight against before. His lungs burned, and his muscles shook…until he inevitably fell, his knees knocking hard against the concrete. Will let out a shout and hit his fist to the ground in irritation.

Whoever this guide was they were far too strong for Will, for any single unbonded guide, and they were being infinitely more careful about this murder than the others.

But why now? There had to be something different about this one.

Will sighed. Though it was frustrating, he could see when he was out of his depth and rose to his feet with the intent to leave.

Standing back up however, made Will's heart sink.

The gale, just as harsh as before, now seemed to be coming from several directions at once, changing every few seconds and making Will brace against it at different angles. He had no idea where he had been heading or where he had come from. He span, searching hastily for any sign of a landmark, of *anything*, but there was nothing, only the force of the wind.

Leaving a headspace was a simple as exiting the way he had entered, but that could have been anywhere. He was in far too far to be able to pull himself out. He could barely move.

God *dammit.*

Will had no idea what to do, this had never happened before.

Was this something they taught guides? Ones that could afford it?

He felt panic begin to overtake him, a pain blossoming behind his eyes which throbbed in time with his heart. Jack would have to call in another guide to get him out, and then they'd *know*. They'd know he had been lying about his abilities, he wouldn't be able to hide, not with how splayed open he was in this moment. They'd force him to bond, there'd be no escape.

Will became so distracted by his spiralling thoughts, his breaths turning ragged, that he almost missed the sound of his name being called.

“Wha-?” Will asked breathlessly, flinching as he felt the phantom warmth of a hand being placed on his arm.

This time he heard clearly, even over the rushing of the wind, the voice emanating from somewhere close to his ear

“Will? Can you hear me?”

Hannibal? Will thought incredulously. There was no mistaking the voice.

“I’m going to try assist you. Don’t panic.” Came the calm baritone, which was anything but calming in this situation.

Oh fuck. “Hannibal, wait-” But his voice was stolen by the wind, and before he could do anything, Will felt the hand on his arm move to touch the side of his face.

Then there was the sound of roaring, louder and more thunderous than the gale which circled him. It drowned out every other sound and thought, even Will’s panic as he turned, wide eyed, to see a giant flood of water rushing towards the position where he stood.

Will attempted to brace himself for the impact, clamping his eyes closed in preparation.

Its arrival was almost anticlimactic. It washed over him, overwhelmed and smothered him, but there was no force behind it and after a short while he realised he wasn’t even drowning. He could breath, easier than he could when not submerged, effortlessly able to cut through and reach his destination which had been impassable before. It didn’t even feel or look like he was underwater. Though it had a definite presence, inescapable…like its owner who stood a few feet in front of him.

When Will reached him, Hannibal smiled and gestured with a tilt of his head to his right. Will knitted his eyebrows together but looked to where he had indicated, down the alleyway and into the unmarred, terrified face of the victim.

A grin that wasn’t Will’s own pulled at his lips, a certain gait he would never adopt to his steps as he made his way towards the shaking woman.

“Wh-what do you want?” The woman asks, eyes wide.

I don’t answer. She’s not worth my time, so far beneath me.

I look her up and down, searching for some inspiration of where to begin. My eyes are drawn to the tattoos on her arms, a physical representation of her bond they must have got done shortly after. They probably thought it was romantic. It looks repulsive.

“That bond of yours is really quite disgusting, perhaps we’ll start there”

No sooner have the words left my mouth and she obeys, tearing into the flesh of her wrist with her finger nails. I feel a rush of power and satisfaction as blood begins to slip to the floor.

She begins to wail, a scream building. I stop her before she can call for help.

"Shh shh, we can't have that" I whisper and she is quiet.

Whatever I suggest, she does. Opening her chest to the air, taking her own life with every piece she removes from herself. I plan to leave her eyes for last, but I am lost in the moment and soon they are gone. I keep going until she stops, until no words will make her move again.

Her still body cools on the pavement.

I feel triumphant.

I am more powerful than any sentinel. I can't stop here, I -

"Will."

The voice startled him out of the headspace, the mask of the killer slipping easier from him than it would have done were he alone. Will shook himself, his stomach rolling from the experience, and backed away from the scene and out of the patchwork memory he had built. Though he knew he'd be visiting the place again in his nightmares.

Will blinked a few times until his eyes focussed, the face of Hannibal coming into view. His hand was still cupping the side of Will's face but this soon dropped when it became clear that he was fully aware.

"I apologise. I saw you become alarmed and knew there was something wrong. Jack fought me on it and I argued against his judgement. It seems he is now under the impression that you and I share some sort of a bond which we are attempting to keep secret," Hannibal said, an amused tilt to his mouth.

Will rubbed at his forehead, his headache making an admirable comeback.

"Great," he said, voice dripping with sarcasm. Jack and Alana (when she inevitably finds out) are going to be annoyingly smug until he sorts this mess out. You'd think working for the FBI would make Jack less likely to jump to conclusions.

"I hope my intrusion wasn't a hindrance to you?" Hannibal asked, a familiar wave of serene curiosity washing over him. However, this brought Will up short. He looked over Hannibal more carefully than before, again only finding curiosity and some annoyance at the smell. He had just witnessed a women eviscerate herself under Will's control, yet was completely unfazed by the violence. If anything Will thought his copper eyes now held the red sheen of blood lust.

Will shook his head, both in answer to Hannibal's question and to clear his thoughts.

At this point Jack finally made his way over, his cloud of emotions somewhat muted compared to earlier, and if there were any tufts of smugness, they were well hidden. Will wondered what Hannibal had said to him.

“You alright?” Jack asked with some genuine concern. Will nodded. “Good. No ID on the body yet, estimated time of death around 24 to 36 hours previous. Disembowelled like the others,” Jack listed, immediately back to business. “What do you have for me?”

Will wanted to sigh internally. At least Jack was consistently…Jack.

“She’s different somehow. The killer felt more involved than with the others but it’s still not personal towards her,” Will said slowly, attempting to organise his experience into some semblance of order that would be useful.

“Isn’t it? I would argue something different. It felt targeted,” Hannibal said thoughtfully.

“I think it’s generalised. Yes the killer hated her specifically in the moment, but she wasn’t the catalyst. Something or someone started this, but it wasn’t her,”

“They’re definitely still aiming for sentinels?” Jack queried.

“Yes…but, only those with a bond,” Will said, certain. “There was a lot of revulsion directed there.”

“Jealousy?” Jack offered.

“Maybe,” Will considered, “but its long since turned to anger.”

“Other than motive what else can you tell me? Occupation? Family? Do they like to take long walks on the beach?”

“They’re a very strong guide…” Will paused, forehead wrinkling as he tried to come up with something. There hadn’t really been any personal information left at all for his psychometry to pick up, almost all of what he got was residual emotion. Their attempt to wipe the information they left pretty much succeeded, and he didn’t want to mention the compulsion. If he could go this whole case without someone realising guides could fool the registry it would be a miracle, but he certainly wouldn’t be the one to tell them.

“A serial killer’s comfort zone is often defined by an anchor point. All the bodies were found very close together, they may live or work nearby,” Hannibal chimed in, noticing Will’s struggle.

Will shook his head, still in thought. “I don’t think so, they come by here often, but not often enough for it to be near a home or workplace. The imprint is too weak.”

“So pretty much anyone in Baltimore.” It was Jack’s turn to rub at his forehead. “Good thing your ability works almost like psychometry at times or we’d have to call in another guide. Do you know how hard it is to find one willing to work crime scenes?” Jack said with a shake of his head, placing his hands back into his pockets.

Will felt his heart rate pick up, the line of questioning was too close to the source of his panic earlier for him to comfortably navigate this conversation.

“It’s surprising sentinels don’t refuse to work scenes like this one, the smell is abhorrent,” Hannibal said, wrinkling his nose for effect.

Jack rolled his eyes, “Before I started working here they would have, but if they can’t do their jobs they don’t deserve to be here. It wouldn’t even if an issue if the higher ups weren’t constantly pandering to these ancient societal traditions that-“

Will knew from experience that once Jack got started on this topic that he’d be busy for a while so he took the opportunity to escape, making himself as unobtrusive as possible to make a clean getaway. It was obvious Hannibal had diverted Jack’s attention purposefully, and while the sentiment was nice, Will wasn’t sure he could trust the motive. He wasn’t sure he could trust Hannibal at all. His reactions today told Will one thing, Hannibal was no stranger to violence and death. But did this make Hannibal a killer? His instincts told him yes, but even so, he had let the man inside his mind twice now, let him see more of himself than he’d shown anyone, and yet Will was no worse off than before. Though reluctant to admit it, he’d even say *better* off in his company.

Of course when Will found someone that didn’t go running at the first sight of his mind it would be a murderer. The moral ambiguity of the situation was too confusing for him to tackle in that moment after the day he’d had.

Despite this, Will could feel a vague hope stirring within him which he quickly had to squash, but the thought still echoed for a while afterwards.

Maybe this was finally someone he could open himself up to?

Chapter End Notes

Hey! So it's been a while since the last update...sorry about that! Real life made a comeback after the summer. My writing muscles are a little rusty and I struggled with this chapter a lot. Can't say I'm completely happy with it but its (finally) done and posted and out of my mind :) Hopefully the next one won't take as long? We'll see....

Thanks for sticking around if you're still here and hope you all have a great new year! :)

Treading water

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The days following the murder scene and Will's near breakdown, were strange. Stranger still than even the ones from recent memory.

After the initial hangover from Hannibal's own brand of guiding wore off once again, Will had a few days of his regular routine before he realised something was amiss.

He felt restless. Unbalanced. Like there was something he had forgotten or somewhere he ought to be. It led to him to – while not zone exactly, experience something very close. He would often catch himself drifting completely into a particular thought of his own or an emotion from someone around him, his feet taking him to odd corners of Quantico or down paths he wouldn't normally track whilst walking his dogs. It left Will feeling disorientated, unsure at any given moment whether what he was experiencing was real or generated within his headspace.

He hated the sensation.

He felt as if he had no control over his abilities, the emotions of others either colliding with him full force or reduced to a quiet background hum, and he could never predict which would occur at any given moment. However, it took until he could feel that phantom breath at the back of his neck again and hear the distant clatter of hooves for Will to try and solve the issue.

His first solution was concentration. If he could keep himself tethered to the present, he wouldn't be able to drift and lose stretches of time. However, this came with some draw backs. Namely a series of intense migraines and the depletion of his aspirin stock. This was undoubtable worse than the regular tension headaches the ratcheting up of his abilities usually caused, so this plan was quickly scrapped.

Next, Will tried the opposite approach. He attempted to nap or at least enter his headspace at every available opportunity, even using the need for sleep as an excuse to cancel his next appointment with Hannibal. Although Will constantly felt as if he were moving through a dense cloud of fog to the point that he could easily lose hours of his day, the thought of Hannibal weighed heavy on his mind, and he was fully prepared this time to cancel his appointment with the doctor within a socially acceptable time frame.

He didn't like to think about Hannibal. How he had so easily merged with his mind. How he had actually *appeared* within his headspace without the help of a bond. How he had watched him effectively eviscerate a woman in front of him, yet he treated him no different.

How his copper eyes had become burgundy with bloodlust.

There was a war within Will. One where he wasn't sure either side had his best interests at heart.

The one person that seemed to fit Will's fragmented mind perfectly, filled in and smoothed all the jagged edges, was also the kind of person who clashed strongest with his morals.

Though really, were Will and Hannibal so different? He was himself responsible for two deaths and although one was indirect, both left him feeling no worse for wear. The first kill by his own hands had felt just. Had made his whole body light up with the raw power and strength he had felt.

It had made him think, *why was I so scared before?*

It was only after, after when the rest of society became a known thing in his mind that the guilt came, followed swiftly with the reason as to why he had been so scared to pull the trigger the first time. The knowledge was as suffocating in its strength as the act itself was liberating.

Will had always been so frightened of losing himself to the mind of one of the killers he investigated, of becoming a mirror image of their own hates and flaws. But somewhere between the first and ninth shot he had unloaded into Hobbs' chest Will had had the stark realisation that what he felt in the moment was only him. Only his wants and desires. And he knew afterwards that the only thing he was fearing was truly himself. Perhaps Hannibal could help find a way for Will to accept himself fully as he was. Although he wasn't sure this was something he actually wanted. The only thing Will really knew during this hazy week when his morals seemed to drift in and out of focus was that he wanted *something*.

There was a pull in his bones, a song in his blood. A call to *something.* Though Will didn't want to think of what that something was just yet.

While his second approach to his problem did give Will ample time to think through the thoughts that had been whirling through his head, it wasn't also without it's flaws. Although he no longer lost time, he still found himself wondering into strange areas and seemingly in random directions, however these were now contained solely to his sleeping world. Will had known for many years that he would sleep walk occasionally, usually when the stress from his guide abilities became too much for him to bear while awake, but it was ultimately harmless and had yet to cause any real issues.

As this solution seemed to have no negative side effects, Will took this as a job well done and considered himself to be effectively cured of his strange dreamlike state. Though he knew this was unlikely to actually be the case, he had absolutely no desire to discuss the issue with anyone, let alone Hannibal or, god forbid, *Alana*. The mothering would become unbearable. So he continued as normal, cancelling a second therapy session and pretending everything was fine.

It was one such day, when the world seemed utterly against him and he had steadfastly attempted to convince himself that he was fine, that Will realised how absolutely wrong he had been.

He had managed to keep his empathy and projection abilities down to a manageable level, however it seemed his psychometry had been glued to high, and nothing he attempted could lower it. This meant everything he touched sent his mind spinning, every slight brush against him in the hallways creating a jolt of nausea and dizziness with all the images and feelings which warred for his attention. It had been unbearable, and he had retreated back to the relative safety of home as soon as possible. So unbearable was it, that he could not even stand to pet his dogs, having to sequester them away so that they would stop coming near him and attempting to gain his attention. The result had left him feeling unmoored and adrift without their company, the only company he had had in the recent weeks. He spent several hours attempting to lower his ability, but when this was fruitless, Will eventually gave up and went to bed, hoping against hope that he would be able to get some sleep and wake the next morning with everything back to normal. He tossed and turned fitfully late into the night, but eventually, to his immense relief, slipped into a deep sleep.

At first he thought he had merely slipped into his headspace, the forest he found himself in so alike to the one near the river he often imagines. However, after awhile he looked down and realised he was not walking on the soft earth of the forest, no snap of twigs or quiet crunch of leaves beneath his feet. It was with a gentle gasp that he noticed that he was walking along an ocean.

The water tumbled and rolled beneath him, restless and impatient, though not impairing his ability to walk across its surface. Solid ice seemed to form beneath his feet, the water freezing upon contact, and while agitated, it seemed eager for him to make his journey and avoided disturbing his path. The ocean seemed endless and there was no clear destination, but Will felt himself continue to move onwards, pulled by something he couldn’t explain.

After he had been walking for what seemed like awhile, Will felt a shadow envelope him and glanced to his right to see the familiar shape of the stag walking alongside him. The sight shocked him into stopping, concerned that his hallucination had someone followed him into his dreams.

Although he had to admit, it did look hauntingly beautiful stood on the turbulence of the ocean, what little light there was illuminating the glint of red on its feathers and making the black of its pelt seem all the more deeper and all consuming. He noticed peripherally that the forest had disappeared sometime during his walk, the trees being replaced with the odd collapsing spire of ice - strange yet somehow fitting for this ocean.

Will stood and stared awhile, curious to his surroundings, though the stag quickly grew impatient, pawing at the ice beneath its hooves to edge Will onwards. Will did not have to be told twice, still somewhat frightened by the animal, and stumbled slightly in his haste to begin walking again.

He was unsure of how long he walked, his feet tired and sore, the stag at his side, but he knew it felt like both an eternity and no time at all. The anticipation of the ocean was catching, and he at some point felt himself looking forward to his destination, although he still had no idea as to where or what this was. So lulled was he by the journey to this fantasy destination and the company of the ocean and his illusionary stag, that when he felt

something grab his hand he jolted in shock. The ice beneath his feet cracked and the stag reared back, the ocean rushing up on either side of them at the sudden movement.

The hand that had gripped his seemed to tighten its hold in response, a sickly warmth flooding him which grated against the pleasant coolness of the ocean and the ice. Will felt nausea and a sense of wrongness overtake him, as a feeling of concern that wasn't his pounded at his skull. The throbbing sound of blood in his ears was overshadowed only by the rushing of the ocean, as the turbulent restlessness beneath his feet became monstrous waves of anger. The ice beneath his feet gave way and Will plummeted into its depths.

Blinking his eyes several times, Will came awake to a bright light shining directly against his face, jarring compared to the darkness of his dreams. He raised his arm in an attempt to block out the light and in turn realised that there were a couple people in front of him attempting to gain his attention. The grip on his hand tightened further and Will was shocked with the comprehension that the man in front of him was a *sentinel* who was *touching him* and jerked his hand back violently, stumbling backward with the force. The pain that radiated up from his feet seemed to ground him, and he looked around to finally notice that he was in the middle of a road, and that the people in front of him were *police officers.*

So much for the sleepwalking being harmless.

"…Can you hear me? Do you need help?" The voice of the officer eventually filtered through his panic.

Will swallowed, throat dry, and attempted to raise his voice enough for them to hear. "I'm fine," he said but then revaluated, "Actually, where am I?"

The officer, the one who had been *touching* him, raised his hands in a placating manner. "On your way towards Baltimore by the looks of it" he joked trying to make light of the situation.

"It looks like you were zoned pretty badly. Does this happen often?" The other officer queried, and rightfully so – guides don't zone easily.

Will shook his head, breaths starting to come out in panicked huffs.

In the middle of a road towards Baltimore? What in the ever-loving fuck was happening to him.

"Is there anyone we can call to help? Any family? A bond-mate or a friend?" The guy asked again, noticing Will's oncoming panic attack.

Will shook his head, clenching his eyes shut against his spiralling thoughts. They'd probably call a guide from the clinic, but he couldn't stand the thought of anyone else touching him at the moment, the wrongness of the touch of the officer sentinel still pounding through him. He stood there for a few moments weathering his attack, but eventually, through the haze of his panic, he manged to latch onto a concrete idea.

He opened his eyes again, interrupting the two officers who were discussing amongst themselves the best move forward. He took as deep a breath as he could manage.

“Actually, there is someone you could call”

To say that Hannibal was frustrated with Will was an understatement. He had wanted to build a relationship with Will slowly, gradually over their sessions as the feeling of grounding that Hannibal gave Will brought him back again and again to his company. But it would appear that Will was stubbornly against the idea.

Hannibal had done some research in the time between his sessions with Will, and from the sources he was able to find regarding spirit guides that wasn’t romanticised nonsense, he had been able to find that it was possible for a guide’s spirit to be visible to another sentinel only when the compatibility between the two was extremely high. Hannibal took this as merely confirmation of what he already knew, it being impossible to mistake his trips into Will’s mind as anything else. Yet even with this presented so clearly, Will still seemed against the concept. It was infuriating, and he would have to get to the bottom of his reluctance to form a bond during one of Will’s future sessions so that he could begin working on correcting this.

However, these sessions never seemed to arrive. Will cancelled one and then another, and Hannibal had no justification for insisting Will attend. Though he was somewhat disappointed, he was extremely patient and knew that if he waited long enough, Will would eventually seek out his company on his own.

It didn’t make the wait any less bearable knowing this fact however.

Hannibal felt himself becoming somewhat restless as the days wore on, and although his control never faulted, he felt himself come the closest he could ever recall being in a very long time. He ached to feel the brush of that brilliant mind once again and felt deprived the longer Will insisted on avoiding him.

It was a few days before Will’s next impending appointment, that things started to turn in Hannibal’s favour.

Hannibal had gone to bed at his usual time, late into the night after having catalogued his cellar stock - his greatly reduced need for sleep often coming in handy for his late-night excursions. He had fallen gradually into a deep sleep, yet unlike on most nights when his dreams were often sparse and contained very little feeling or detail, Hannibal found himself greatly absorbed in the images his mind had chosen to centre on.

He dreamed of Will, walking side by side with his manifestation of death, his path creating a bridge between his mind and Hannibal’s own. He had walked determinedly, a striking figure against the unrest of his ocean, whilst small spires of ice formed at his back. Such towers were weak and already melting soon after their creation, but Hannibal could see how they could form the foundation of something much greater.

His journey seemed agonisingly slow, and Hannibal wished he could urge Will onwards at a much faster pace, but even in this dream world he knew that it was best to let Will come to Hannibal of his own volition, without any outside force.

Hannibal bitterly regretted this decision later however, when a loud crack resounded within Will's ice, Will himself rearing back in fright. A warm gale swirled around Will, melting the ice and undoing all the progress he had made towards Hannibal, dropping him completely out of reach. Hannibal felt he could roar in frustration, the wrongness of the intruder setting his teeth on edge and causing him to wake with his fists clenched and an anger burning low in his stomach.

It took awhile for Hannibal to regain control of his emotions, confused as to how a dream could have affected his control to such an extent. He assumed it was some kind of latent sentinel instinct in reaction to a threat to a guide, able to influence him in response to even an imaginary threat such as the one in his dream. The thought made him sigh loudly, hoping that Will would be able to get over his reluctance soon, so that Hannibal's control would stop being affected so easily.

Sure that any more sleep would grant him no more rest, Hannibal dressed in his usual manner and made to continue through his morning routine. He had just began his breakfast preparations when his mobile began to chime. A quick glance at the clock revealed it to be just before 6am – much too early for a social call, a none of his current patients were in such an extreme state as to warrant an out of hours phone call. His curiosity piqued, Hannibal wiped his hands on his apron and fished out his mobile, finding the familiar name of Alana Bloom flashing across the screen.

"Good morning Alana, to what do I owe the pleasure?" Hannibal answered in his best magnanimous voice, tone light and person suit firmly in place.

"Morning Hannibal, sorry about the early hour." She sounded weary, tired and worn down which was completely unlike the Dr Bloom he had come to know. Listening further he could tell that she was outside, the particular sound of a polystyrene cup clenched in her hand. The image was so clear and familiar to him that he could almost smell the pungent stench of improperly brewed coffee from where he stood in his kitchen.

"Not a problem, I am usually up at this hour. Is everything well?"

"Yes…well, no. I'm fine, but Will very much isn't" At the mention of the guide, Hannibal's interest immediately increased, a rare intrusion of worry worming its way through him.

"Has something happened?"

Alana gave a self-deprecating laugh, "You could say something has been happening for quite a while. I discovered tonight that Will had been suffering from the equivalent of a guide zone on and off for god knows how long, and tonight…tonight was bad". Hannibal's mind whirled with thought. The last time he had interacted with Will he had seemed perfectly stable, but could the crime scene have had a bigger impact on him than he had thought? He had believed that he guided Will well through the onslaught the murderer had left behind for the

unsuspecting guide, but could he have been mistaken, or was this a side effect of the pseudo bond he had formed in order to ground him?

“I had no idea. Will cancelled our last two sessions, but with his reluctance towards therapy and his busy schedule I did not think this to be unusual”

“I wouldn’t have either, but I got a call from a police officer tonight. A couple of officers had apparently found him standing in the middle of a road, over 5 miles from his house. He had been walking for *hours* with bare feet in the cold. I had to collect him from the hospital because they refused to discharge him without a sentinel or guide to take him home.” She paused then, seemingly to gather her thoughts, and took a deep breath. “He’s in a bad state Hannibal,” she confessed. “His emotions are usually clamped down so tightly I can barely ever get a clear read on him, but his control was so full of holes that I could sense his panic from two yards away”

This did sound unusual. His brief experience into Will’s mind had told him all he needed to know about Will’s control. Just the fact of him being an unregistered full guide told him a lot about his usual composure.

Hannibal’s mind jumped from thought to thought, a concrete plan forming as to how he could use this situation to his advantage.

“He’s convinced himself it’s just the usual sleep walking, but it’s easy to tell the difference. He refuses to let me help in any capacity though. The suborn fool thinks it will just go away if he leaves it long enough. He’s as obstinate as my sentinel patients I swear,” she laughed again, but there was no real joy in her tone.

Alana was such a caring soul, Hannibal could imagine how much it hurt her not being able to help someone she thought of as a friend.

“I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind going to see him. He doesn’t usually like interacting with sentinels, but you seem to be the exception. And god knows he needs someone to ground him at the moment. Or at least convince him to seek professional help, and you’re the best person I know for that sort of uphill battle.”

Hannibal felt a grin tug at this mouth, the pieces falling into place.

“Of course. While Will may not be my patient in an official capacity, I have grown rather fond of him during our short acquaintance and would be happy to help as much as I am able.”

Alana let out a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Hannibal. I thought it may have been asking too much, especially as you took him on as a favour to me, but it’s good to know that you’re looking out for him.”

Hannibal agreed, “and it’s good to know he has such diligent friends.”

The rest of the conversation was amicable, if short, and with the smile returned to Alana’s voice they ended with a promise to meet again soon.

Hannibal returned to his cooking with a renewed vigour, altering his plans as he began making preparations for his meeting with a certain marvellously headstrong guide.

It seemed that Hannibal’s patience was being rewarded much sooner than he had expected.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! Not sure if anyone is still interested in this story (I can't believe I last updated in 2016!!) but here's a surprise chapter.
I would recommend reading from the beginning if you're still interested, because even I forgot what happened in the previous chapters ^^;
No promises on how frequently I update this, but I think there are roughly five chapters left of this plus an epilogue if you wanted to stick around :)

Come Hell Or High Water

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a thoroughly embarrassing trip to the hospital, with Will sat in his sweat stained pyjamas in the back of a police cruiser, Will was fully prepared to die. Truly only death could have saved him from his current nightmare of finding himself having to deal with several nurses, more than a few of which were guides, trying to patch him up both physically and mentally while his control was almost completely shot to shit.

Will felt like caged animal, jumping when anyone got too close, and lashing out at any of the guides who dared try their luck. Of course, this only increased their concern and made them double their efforts, but eventually with some convincing by the police officers (because of course the sentinel officer had stayed out of some misplaced protective instinct), a non-guide nurse treated his feet and provided a couple blankets and warm drink for his mild hypothermia. It came with the caveat that they either call a professional guide to treat the rest of his mental suffering or call a guide he knew well. Obviously, he had already let slip about Alana, his guide psychiatrist friend, so she was inevitably informed of his current condition and her necessity to come pick him up if he had any hope of being discharged before a nurse tackled him to the ground and psychically dragged him to a guide clinic. Will had sighed loudly, wishing the polystyrene cup in his hands contained coffee (or something stronger) instead of the hot honey lemon water he was currently sipping.

He was annoyed at himself, specifically at whatever this weird state was that he had descended into and that didn't seem to be lifting anytime soon. He felt splayed open with such little control over his abilities. On a regular day he wouldn't have even registered to the nurse guides, and he wouldn't have needed to worry about one getting too close. He couldn't help but be glad, however, that he had maintained enough control over his abilities that no one had yet questioned his unbonded status. He didn't like to think about the mess it would have caused if he had started projecting his annoyance at the nurses. It wouldn't have been pretty.

Although Will was glad that Alana was going to be the one taking him home, he was also dreading her arrival. Alana was kind, genuinely, and while he loved that about her it also meant she was prone to mothering. It was very easy to set off her caring instinct (one which all guides had, even if Will's was buried a little deeper) and it left Will feeling guilty more often than not. When she finally saw him as he was now, sat in a wheelchair, emotions wild and uncontrolled, wrapped in a couple blankets with several layers of bandages around his feet, and all round pathetic looking, she would most likely pitch a fit. He never knew how to deal with an angry Alana. She so very rarely got to the point of anger, always projecting calm and tranquil emotions into everyone around her so as to avoid any situation escalating. It made her seem like one of the most composed people Will knew, though this felt like an artificial peacefulness compared to Hannibal's ocean of actual calm. It made the times when she truly lashed out all the more distressing.

The look on Alana's face when she finally did turn up made Will want to crawl inside himself, bury his head in the sand and pretend he was still dreaming. She looked the most beat up he had ever seen her, confirming his earlier thoughts. Black circles had already begun forming under her eyes from the late-night trip to the hospital and the stress that the call from the police had no doubt caused her. Thick waves of concern and fear began winding around him as soon as he was within eyeshot, and a cursory tendril tested his boundaries to get a better read on him. Will attempted a smile in her direction, but this only deepened her fear, the vines spinning and snapping with the intensity.

Luckily for Will, a couple of the more persistent nurses still refused to leave him alone and so he didn't have to deal with Alana's impending lecture until he was safely out the hospital and buckled into her car, blanket still securely around his shoulders.

"…Sorry about this. I couldn't think of anyone else to call" Will said, attempting to break the silence which had sat heavy between them for several minutes.

"What's going on Will?" Alana replied, eyes glued to the road. She sounded calm, which was admirable given the strength of the agitation of her emotions.

"What do you-"

"Don't give me that bullshit," she interrupted, heat colouring her words. She took a breath, Will assumed to calm herself, and took a few minutes. "You've been struggling. Don't lie, I know you. It's been going on for a long time, and it's upsetting watching how much Taylor's death has hurt you" She said quietly, rushing through the words as if saying them quicker would prevent agitating him.

"*Don't*-" Will began, knowing that she was going to start in on his broken bond again, but was quickly interrupted.

"No. Let me say my piece. I have never once fully broached the topic, for your sake, but I think I have the right to voice my thoughts tonight," She glanced sideways at him. In the low light it made the look seem almost like a glare, and Will clamped his mouth shut and mentally prepared for the lecture. "He was your bondmate Will. The first person you let anywhere near that close to you, and his death was heart breaking. You can deny it all you like but I know this had to have affected you deeply. It takes people *years* of therapy to get over something like that, but you have not done a single thing to help you deal with the trauma. Nothing. Like with everything, you hid yourself away and pretended your problems would just *disappear.* You're barely functioning right now, and you sure as hell deserve more than just *functioning*." She said this emphatically, as if she had been preparing this speech for years. She probably had. In her eyes he probably hadn't been functioning since they met. "I am here for you, and I swear to god I'm not going to let this get any worse, so I want you to explain to me what happened tonight. Honestly. In full. Or I'm turning this car around and taking you back to that hospital."

Will swallowed when she finished. He was unsure how to deal with the deluge of pent up emotion, or how to begin explaining something he didn't really understand himself. There sure as hell were details he never wanted Alana to know, but if he didn't tell her some

semblance of the truth he knew that tonight would be the one when he finally lost Alana as a friend.

He took a deep breath and started with the facts, hoping an explanation would come to him.

“I was sleepwalking.”

“Sleepwalking,” Alana repeated, disbelief coiled tightly around her.

“Yes. Sleepwalking.” Will stated plainly again.

“You’re telling me you sleepwalked *five miles*?” The disbelief snapped at him with the raise in her voice.

“It happens when I am… more affected by my ability… sometimes.” Will felt her attempting to read him, root around in his emotions to find a trace of a lie. Will was glad she decided to do this early on in the conversation. Although this was the truth, later information he would tell her if asked definitely would not be.

Alana sighed, incredulity still thick in her tone. “And your first thought is that this is sleepwalking and not a guide zone”

“Guides don’t zone,” Will pointed out before his brain caught up with a more tactful wording of his disagreement.

“You know damn well what happens when a guide overuses their ability”

“Yes, but that didn’t happen. I was sleeping and I woke up. I can even tell you the dream I was having if that’ll prove anything.” Alana’s anger, while disorientating, was starting to become annoying.

“*Fine.* And how often does this happen? How long has this *been* happening?”

Will took a few seconds to think through his answer, while it was true that his sleepwalking hadn’t occurred in a while, he needed to give her a reason as to why it was happening now. Something that would draw her anger away from him.

“Not often. I guess I have been more stressed lately….with the new case,” he eventually settled on. She had been against him working cases for a while now, and was in a constant state of mild annoyance at Jack for insisting he was needed.

“And have you been talking to Hannibal about this?”

Wills mind churned for an acceptable answer that wasn’t too far from the truth, but the silence stretched too long this time and Alana eventually caught on.

“Right. Of course you haven’t. Is it the case itself which is causing the stress or the fact that it’s your first case since the Hobbs shooting?”

So much for diverting her anger.

“The perpetrator is a guide. A really strong one. I’ve been struggling at the crime scenes.” Half truths were always better than outright lies.

“Right, so I’m going to talk to Jack about suspending you from this case and giving you some time off work. And *you* will need to start giving some serious thoughts into bonding”

Will spluttered, unsure what to tackle first. “*What?”*

“You’re unmoored Will. You need some kind of anchor, and because you only have your empathy, even a weak bond will ground you. You’re drifting away. You need this, before there’s nothing left of you.”

Will chewed on this information angrily, irritation spiking. He was strong enough to exist on his own, he had to be, being the failed guide that he was. Bonding was not a catch all cure to his problems. Others existed without a bond, and he’d be damned before his fractured mind snuffed out the life of another sentinel.

“A bond is the last thing I need, especially right now, and you have no right to take me off this case.” Even if it was true that this case was slowly turning the splintered edges of his mind into jagged points, he had to be involved. He couldn’t stomach not knowing when someone was going to discover that the guide they were after had slipped through the registry, and what this would mean for him in the long run. He didn’t protest the time off work. While he liked giving lectures he hated being in a room with a hundred noisy trainees and the endless piles of garbage essays.

“As a consulting psychiatrist for the FBI and your friend I have every right. This case drove you to walk five miles, barefoot, in the middle of the night for no apparent reason. It would be self-destructive of you to keep going. If anyone but Jack knew they would be ordering a mandated guide evaluation. I don’t know what you have against guides going into your headspace but don’t think I’m not aware that you’ve managed to worm your way into your job while only taking a psych eval”.

There was silence as Will digested this, the information cooling his anger. He couldn’t fault her logic. If anyone at the FBI knew, he wouldn’t escape a trip to the guide clinic. And at the rate he was going, even if Alana didn’t tell anyone about the incident, it wouldn’t be long before someone found out he was becoming unstable. He felt his heart rapidly sink.

Alana rightly took the silence as agreement and continued.

“So. No more cases until you stop sleepwalking. I won’t force you to see a professional guide, and if you don’t think bonding is right for you, I won’t force that point either.”

Will’s mood felt slightly lifted at the announcement. It wasn’t the perfect solution, but he’d take it as the lesser of two evils.

“My only condition,” Alana started, and Will felt his heart sink right back down again, “is that you start speaking to Hannibal”

Will blinked. “What has Hannibal got to do with any of this?”

“Look Will, Hannibal doesn’t bond, not with his patients, not with anyone. You are not even officially his patient, so you know you don’t have to worry about being near him. While a bond would be a better anchor point, I think just being around a sentinel will do you good. Actually talking through the issues you’ve been having would do even more” Will felt a hysterical laugh bubble up inside him. Hannibal was the one sentinel Will should worry about being around. He’d stop Will from drifting to pieces, but not before he dragged him under.

“It’s a compromise,” Alana continued, sensing Will’s reluctance, “You refuse to see a guide who can heal you, sentinels are known to have a calming presence for guides. I’m guessing you haven’t been attending your informal therapy sessions, so I want you to make some effort.”

“I don’t see why that’s necessary,” he grumbled, knowing he sounded petulant.

Alana’s turned to look at him, eyes soft. Will felt as if he were burning under the pressure of her warmth. “I know you like him. And you need someone else you can call when things go to shit.”

Will felt emotionally drained. Alana really didn’t understand how little others cared for him beyond their curiosity. Especially when they got to know him, and Hannibal had seen more of him than most others ever would.

“That doesn’t mean he will want to show up.”

“I think you’d be surprised. I’ve known him a long time and I can tell when he’s just being nice for social niceties sake. He likes you Will.” Will felt her attempt to project her earnestness into him. For once he let her, not rebuffing the effort. No amount of earnestness could convince him.

“He’s interested in me. That isn’t the same thing. Not in my case.” Will turned to look out the window, voice defeated and confident that this would be the end of the conversation.

There was a long stretch of silence after this, the only sound of the car rushing along the highway. Will attempted to stare outside at the passing scenery, but his eyes were mostly drawn to the pathetic image of his reflection. Being the most empathetic guide ever registered meant there were many people interested in him. Rarely anyone that cared for him as a person beyond scientific study or idle curiosity. Will would like to think Alana was the only intersection between the two, but he knew there were aspects of his self that she would never approve of. She’d never like him – not as a whole. Even she had known this for a very long time.

When they had almost reached their destination, a long while since he’d had the last word and long enough to almost completely forget what was last said, Alana whispered something barely audible over the rush of the wind.

“For Hannibal it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter today but a much quicker update than I was expecting :) This and the next chapter were originally meant to be just one but it came out much longer than I planned so I had to split them. I thought I'd publish this now instead of you waiting until I'm finished editing the second half because, considering my track record, it might take me awhile ^^;

Also, a quick thank you to everyone who left kudos and commented on the previous chapter after my long break! It was so nice to know there were people still interested in reading this. It really made my day, and motivated me to continue :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!